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PRISONERS

FRANZ MOLNAR

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PRISONERS

PRISONERS

A Novel By

FRANZ MOLNAR

Author of Liliom, The Swan, Etc.

Translated from the Hungarian by

JOSEPH SZEBENYEI

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PREFACE

Franz Molnar, the Author and the Man

THERE was a time when the preface was considered a very important part of a book, and notable writers were inundated with requests from lesser lights to perform this charitable service for them. It is about time to turn the tables and let the lesser lights write the prefaces to the works of the notable. That such a thing is possible, only proves that the preface is not taken very seriously to-day. Perhaps Mr. Bernard Shaw is one distinguished exception, although it may not be safe to say he takes anything seriously.

A preface to this Molnar novel would be quite out of place were it not the first of his novels to be published in the English language and if it did not seem a gracious thing to do to make better

the acquaintance between the famous Hungarian playwright and his public in the English-speaking countries. His delightful personality and his eminence in the literary world make the task a pleasant one and must serve as excuse for this approach of the lesser light. At first I thought to ask Molnar himself to perform his own English introduction; but then I realized that his modesty, his shyness, would not let him tell all that a friendly and interested public would like to know about him. As a matter of fact, none of his books in the original is prefaced, and he will, no doubt, object to anything I may say here that goes beyond the bare statement that he is the author of the book.

Franz Molnar began to write when he was eighteen. I mean to write professionally. He was the son of a medical man and a student of medicine at the Budapest University when he first joined the staff of a newspaper. He wrote a daily "*croqui*," a satirical little sketch in the

manner of the French wits, such as Alfred Capus and his contemporaries, and immediately attracted attention. He took a foremost place almost from the start and by the time he was twenty-two he was considered one of Hungary's most brilliant young writers. He was then doing short stories and dialogues, and those about the joys and sorrows of children soon became nationally known and greatly admired. His uncanny knowledge of the child mind and his powers of close observation, even before his first book was published, gained him a reputation such as very few writers of his age could boast. One of the most notable of his children's dialogues, (mind you, not written for, but of children), is *Horses' Feathers*, in which two six-year-old boys carry on a conversation about death and the undertaker's horses which have "feathers stuck into their heads, and it don't hurt them at all." One of the boys is dying, and the other informs him of the fact with the question: "Why not give me

the brass ball, you're going to die anyhow?" "The most cruel men are children," says Molnar and he often handles them in that spirit.

These dialogues about children are as vivid as dramas. I have heard them recited and they immediately assumed the proportions of a play; the characters are so real, their talk so human.

Perhaps his success with children's sketches inspired him to write his first play, at the age of twenty-three, around a child. It was called *Jozsi*, (Joe) and introduced the "bad boy" of six, the spoilt and obnoxious infant of rich, uncultured and indulgent parents. It was a cruel piece of sarcasm which failed largely, perhaps, because of its cruelty. A year or two later he offered another play, also a comedy, but this time in the French manner of the day, without the bedroom atmosphere of the Flers and Cavaillet types. It was entitled *A Doktor Ur*, (meaning *The Lawyer*), and it was an instant hit. A clean-cut and wholesome comedy built around a lovable burglar

who preaches morals to the respectable members of his lawyer's family and who is so good-hearted that he commits burglaries only in order to give his lawyer a chance to defend him, get him acquainted and so gain fame and renown. Molnar does not think highly of this early work of his and is fighting continually to prevent foreign managers from producing it.

Then followed two novels, *The History of a Derelict Boat*, the tragic love story of a girl of fifteen, and *The Hungry City*, a satire dealing with Budapest and its corruptness.

After these came his play, *The Devil*, which established him as a playwright and gave him an international reputation. Hungarian authors' rights not being protected at that time in the United States, two managers produced it here simultaneously and with great success. To their great credit, I must add, both of them paid Molnar his royalties although legally neither was liable. *The Devil* was the first modern Hungarian play

to be produced in France, England and America. With it Molnar broke the hard trail for many another playwright, put Hungary on the literary map, fixed the eyes of the theatrical world on him and incidentally on his country, which benefited greatly by his genius. Like all prophets, Molnar did not win the acclamation at home that he won abroad. Only a small intellectual and progressive group lionized him, while the older generation of writers, the conservatives and reactionaries shunned him and his writings and for many years—though he never sought membership—refused to elect him in the literary societies of the great. Still, his following grew year by year and soon the societies could no longer ignore him. Molnar, however, did ignore them. He never went to their meetings and took no notice of them even after he had been a member for years.

The next in line among his novels was *Eva*, which deals with sex hunger in its least offensive sense and is considered one of the most charac-

teristic and subtle of his stories. *Liliom*, his play which the Theatre Guild produced in 1922 with such success, was written about this time, in 1911. According to Molnar, it was an instant failure in his own city, although the *Vigszinhaz* (Comedy Theater) where it was originally produced, has always kept it in its repertory, presenting it several times every year. When it reached its one hundredth performance, not a negligible figure in Hungary, Molnar declared to Mr. Gilbert Miller who sat next to him in a box at the Budapest Theater: "This is the hundredth time *Liliom* has failed in Budapest." It failed in London, too, some years later, but it was an unquestioned success in America.

Then followed ten hectic, Bohemian years of hard work in which he wrote two or three more novels, ten plays and as many volumes of short stories, sketches, dialogues and essays. His most noteworthy plays apart from those I have mentioned, are: *The Wolf*, which in Europe was one of

Molnar's greatest successes, not only in Hungary and Austria, but in every country from Italy to the northernmost parts of the old continent. In America it was called the *Phantom Rival* and was killed by an attempt to Americanize it. It was a mistaken idea which producers once had that no foreign play could stand on its own merits here and in England, but must be "Americanized" or "Anglicized": short for adapted. Several of Molnar's plays have since been presented in their original form, setting and costuming, and having succeeded, the managers have come to realize that artistic material only suffers from alteration of scene and line. *Liliom* is a classic example of this contention. On the stage it was a lasting and genuine success. On the screen, where the locale was shifted from the Budapest City Park to Coney Island, it was a dismal failure.

Molnar's next play to win international favor was *The Swan*, produced by the Comedy Theater, in Budapest, with Iren Varsanyi, a fine actress

of great charm, who has figured prominently in many of Molnar's plays. She is the Maude Adams and Mrs. Fiske of Hungary, combined. *The Swan* was produced here in 1923 by Gilbert Miller, for the Charles Frohman Company, with Eva Le Gallienne who had previously played Julie in *Liliom.* It was an instantaneous popular and artistic triumph.

Then followed *The Guardsman* (*Testor*), which has been revived so successfully after a number of years, by the Theater Guild; *Farsang*, which was not supposed to see the light in this country, inasmuch as Molnar was opposed to its production abroad, will shortly be produced under the title *Carnival; The White Cloud*, a one-act play, first produced by the National Theater at Budapest; and *Heavenly and Earthly Love*, which is a somewhat altered presentation of his novel, *The Derelict Boat.* This was brought to Broadway, under the title *Launzi*, by Mr. Hopkins in 1923 but failed after a week's run; *Fashions for*

Men (*Uri Divat*), a comedy that had a short run in New York, was an artistic but not a popular success. Three one-act plays, under the collective title *Theater*, dealing with actors and actresses, have not yet reached the American stage. His latest play, *The Red Mill*, is to be produced by Mr. Belasco, and still another new play, *The Glass Slipper*, by the Frohman Company.

To return to Molnar's novels, the list would not be complete without mentioning *The Story of a Budapest Girl*, *Andor*, and *The Boys of Paul Street*, the latter a story about boys in the style of Joseph Anthony's *The Gang*. It is on the shelves of every Hungarian boy's library.

The Story of a Budapest Girl deals with modern, easy-going young woman; the débutante who is out to "have a good time," and who regards love as a mere pastime. She becomes a tragic figure that might hail from any large city; her sisters are to be found everywhere.

PREFACE

To write a short biography of Molnar, the man, is a much more difficult task than to tell of his works. In his twenties, he was distinctly under the influence of contemporary French literature, and his life too was shaped after the fashion of French writers of the time; a sort of Quartier Latin life, full of color and intellectual bohemianism. He wore his hair rather long, and the monocle was never absent. Always he dressed with most scrupulous elegance and, coming as he did from a well-to-do family, he never knew the poverty that is the share of most of his contemporary colleagues in Hungary. The country being small, with an almost negligible reading public, writers are compelled to take up newspaper work to eke out a living. Molnar started out as a newspaper man along with the others, and kept up his connections with daily publications for many years. During the war he was a correspondent at the front for an evening paper and contributed some of the most valuable ar-

ticles that have ever appeared in this ghastly field of writing. His stories had a human touch about them, and were popular even in enemy countries. I was on the *London Morning Post* during the war and translated for that paper almost all of Molnar's war letters. They won instant popularity in England, for they were artistic and, above all, human, tenderly, beautifully human. They were published later in a volume entitled *A War-Correspondent's Diary.*

As I said before, Molnar has never dabbled in politics, has never written a line on any political subject. Society and its shortcomings, the poor and their misery, interest him almost exclusively, and most of his novels, short stories and plays deal with the oppressed, the hungry and the miserable. Even in *The Swan,* a comedy of royalty, his chief concern is with Agi, the poor humiliated tutor who is a man even though in that high social atmosphere he is not so regarded.

The readers will notice in *Prisoners* also, that

the fallen, the down-trodden creature, the underdog, holds his sympathy. His heroes and heroines are always the creatures of misfortune: the barker of the merry-go-round, the servant girl, the cab-driver, the waitress who steals, the young girl hopelessly in love, the starving artist, and the actress who never gets a chance and is burning up with ambition.

Molnar has no villains in his stories. He does not believe in them. Even the bad man is just a man, an erring man, but a man, who has his good qualities, just as the good one has his bad qualities.

Franz Molnar at forty-six has written twelve plays and as many volumes of novels and short stories, but he has not yet reached his zenith, indeed the world is just beginning to turn toward him.

JOSEPH SZEBENYEI.

PRISONERS

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CHAPTER I

At the railway station two porters were lifting an immense trunk on to the box of a cab. Snow was falling in heavy flakes and the cabby thoughtfully covered the trunk with a horse blanket; then he mounted the box with that cheerful agility characteristic of the cabby assured of arriving fares.

In the arched doorway of the station a woman, fat and no longer young, appeared, paused for an instant and then rushed almost headlong into the cab. She was followed by a young man and a still younger woman. The man assisted the girl into the cab, raised his hat and turned to the driver.

"To the old city prison," he said, quite casually.

The cabby stared for a moment as if he had not understood, then accepting this unusual address, he cracked his whip-lash and hurried off along the snow-covered thoroughfare.

Rough mounds of snow were piled high in the gutters; only a thin white sheet covered the center of the roadway as if it had but a moment before been spread over the smooth dark asphalt.

The girl drew herself together in her corner of the carriage and wiped off a round spot on the window with her white gloves to get a better view of the passers-by.

"The snow isn't attractive here, at all," she said with childish disappointment in her voice. "I don't like it. It is only pretty out in the wide fields, where everything is white no matter which way you look. . . ."

Her companion made no reply; ignoring the remark as one used to hearing but not listening

to the inconsequential talk of youth. The cab rattled on toward the outskirts; the city with its shops and large houses was soon behind them; cobblestones succeeded to asphalt, and the snow lay thick and heavy and undisturbed.

"That's better," said the girl as if to put her seal of approval on nature's unaided efforts. "This is real snow, the way I like it. Isn't it pretty, Aunt Maria?"

Aunt Maria glanced indifferently at the white brightness, but made no reply. Just now her feet were cold and instead of admiring the brilliant expanse, she frowned her disapproval. With the dependent poor relation's feeling of resentment, she wondered why people always chose the moment for enjoyment when she was most uncomfortable or unhappy.

They were passing rich farm lands now; here and there a small hothouse came in view, sleeping in the midst of its vegetable garden; snug beneath its blanket of snow. Thin pale smoke rose

straight as a lark toward the sky. Gardeners were heating their hothouses in honor of some aristocratic plant. These, too, were lost in the vineyards and wide tracts of land that followed.

Soon a scant fringe of suburbs, and suddenly Budapest, its big apartment houses and palaces standing guard at the city limits like gorgeously attired porters at the gates of the mighty—perhaps just to frighten away the poor who might venture to enter where life offers its pleasures only to the rich. Soon the cab turned into a narrow road leading from the highway and immediately in the distance a large yellow building outlined itself against the horizon.

The young girl gazed eagerly in its direction.

"Is that it?" she asked.

Aunt Maria condescended to answer this time. "Yes," she said, "that is it."

"It's a pity."

The older woman turned toward her companion.

"Why should it be a pity?"

"That we have arrived, I mean. I love to drive through the snow-covered countryside."

"Why, you have not seen your father for a year, and now, instead of being overjoyed, you rave about the beauties of nature!"

With that she returned to silence and the warm folds of her shawl as though to say why upbraid such a foolish child. The young girl paid not the slightest attention to her aunt's outburst. These two had become quite used to each other; they had reached a common ground of misunderstanding. For misunderstanding may link people together as surely as similarity of temperament. Each wraps himself in his own contention, quite satisfied to be in the company of one whom he knows he shall never be able to transform into his own image.

As they neared the huge yellow pile it became apparent that it was not a single structure but a group of buildings, huddled close together as if

in fear of some threatened catastrophe. The eaves of the slanting roofs seemed to touch hands, while the walls stood shoulder to shoulder with their neighbors as if to gain courage from friendly contact. From the center of a court-yard girdled by high walls, the yellow cluster rose, mute, inhospitable, sinister, snow-capped.

When the cab stopped at the iron-barred entrance, an armed guard from behind the gate gave it an indifferent glance. But when he saw the trunk and hand-bags and glimpsed an eager young face behind the glass of the cab door, he hurriedly opened the gate, calling over his shoulder as he ran:

"Hey there, Szabo, come and help take off the luggage! The young lady's arrived!" Then with a friendly smile he assisted the women to alight.

Szabo, also in uniform, grinned a welcome as he helped the cabman with the trunk, and watched the new arrivals as they disappeared within the

enclosure. The cabby, pocketing his fare and a generous pourboire, asked with eager curiosity:

"Do these ladies live here?"

"Yes," answered Szabo, "the young lady is the warden's daughter."

"I see." It was evident that all the way out the cabby had been troubled with the problem. "It's all right, yes," he added. Then with another glance at the courtyard, he mounted his box and drove away, leaving only the narrow trail of his rubber-tired wheels to show that a gay Gizella-Square cab had journeyed to and from the gloomy prison.

Again silence hovered over the yellow buildings. A mild and playful morning breeze awoke to chase the white flakes along the roof's ridge. Now and again small clusters of snow dropped from the barren branches of the trees. But not the slightest sound found its way through the protecting walls. An oppressive calm hung over the place, a calm that seemed to say: one may

only enter here. This warning was mirrored on the faces of the guards; was proclaimed by the noisy clanging of the gates; was made final by the very silence that followed their harsh reverberations.

And on this fresh winter morning Lenke Rimmer moved into the yellow house, seventeen years behind her; a folio of sentimental German music under her arm; many white and pink dresses in the big trunk—a few Marlitt novels hidden beneath them—and a head full of dreams of the young man who had ordered the cabby at the railway station to drive to the old city prison.

CHAPTER II

Lenke was nine years old when she saw with childish curiosity and innocent indifference that the body carried away in a solemn black wagon was that of her mother. She was thirteen on the day her father took her to Dresden where she was to be educated in a famous school for girls. It was there that Clara Radowsky, daughter of the president of the tribunal, who had just come home, had been educated, having been sent under similar circumstances. It was there that all the motherless girls, or so it seemed, were being brought up; as if that big, clean, German city were orphan asylum to all the world—to all who could afford it. Fathers, unequal to the task of caring for their motherless daughters, serious-looking and often elderly, gathered there from all over the continent, their hands clasped desper-

ately by pale and wondering little creatures who cried bitterly the first lonely night and sobbed silently in the morning when they failed to see on the wall paper the design familiar to their waking eyes. And the principals of these great boarding-schools—well aware of their responsibility; serious, severe and be-spectacled, assuming the mother rôle with dignity a little overdone; conserved scrupulously their charges' pocket-money, though bereaved fathers send their ample checks the first of every month.

From this place Lenke went direct to the prison house. Her father long ago had one of the residential rooms refurnished and freshly papered for her. The prisoners had done the work. For these past six months it had been ready to receive its new occupant and Warden Rimmer always alluded to it as "my daughter's room." Grave and lonely, he had looked forward to his daughter's coming with childish impatience. For many years he had seen her only for a month each sum-

mer, when she visited her aunt at Kecskemet, going directly there from Dresden, her father usually arriving the same day from Budapest. He did not like the idea of his daughter spending her vacation in the prison building, consequently Lenke had never set foot in her future home until this day. When she went first to her German school it was from the prison residence in a little Transylvania town from which a year later her father was transferred to Budapest, and a small bachelor apartment was all he called home.

Rimmer had never considered the possibility that in time his daughter might share this home with him. His thought was that he would continue to meet her at her aunt's house at Kecskemet until she was done with her schooling and then, for the few months she was making ready to marry, she would have to be satisfied with a little room . . . in the prison. He laid his plans carefully for his daughter's future. Everything was ready and prepared. In no single letter to

her during these years had he ever failed to give a detailed account of Some One's progress. The witty sayings, successes, the passing of examinations, the kindly messages of this some one were the unfailing subjects of his correspondence. Nicholas enters a famous law office . . . Nicholas has become a Doctor of Laws and everybody is congratulating him wherever he appears and it would surprise nobody if they were to beflag the city in his honor. Nicholas was featured in every one of his letters, featured with the naive insistence that a father uses if he is out to arouse his daughter's interest in the young man he has chosen for her. In this respect, fathers have not changed in a thousand years. They will recommend a young man to the good graces of their daughters with the very same words they use in endorsing an old friend for a lucrative position demanding tact and faithfulness.

But Lenke was so young she understood her father's letters perfectly. This is not said in jest.

Only very young girls and very old men prize undue seriousness in a young man. Only these two look upon frivolity with contempt; the one because it is an unknown land to her and the other because he is past its fortifications. Lenke pictured Nicholas Chathy as the most serious and, therefore, most important man alive and whenever her father's letters dealt lightly with his gravity, Nicholas himself had to make up for it during the summer month at the aunt's house where he always happened to be invited for the four weeks Lenke spent there. He came, usually, a few days after Lenke's arrival; and he packed his trunks as a rule the day after Lenke's departure.

Whatever passed between the young couple during these summer vacations, is probably not worth recording here. They lived and reveled in those glorious commonplaces of youth which evoke sweeter and dearer sensations than life itself, the mere allusion to which awakens tender

memories in our hearts. The music of these sentimental interludes is so infinitely fragile—the melody so delicately woven that they crumble into nothingness as soon as you try to compose them into an orchestral whole. At most, they should be represented by a sigh, and even this should belong only to him who breathes it. It is better to drop the subject altogether.

The little room Lenke was to occupy was as clean and sweet as a chapel, although it was to be but a temporary place of abode. However, they never discussed the subject responsible for the casualness of this residence. That was as much a matter of course as eating and drinking. Nicholas was referred to in their conversation as one of the family, as one who had long since lost that glamour of interest, that mystery, that eternal fascination that envelopes those who are strangers to us. "Nicholas" sounded like a song they had sung so often that the sweetness of it had evaporated. For music is lovely only so long as

we are not too well acquainted with it. The very intimate friend and the very often-heard song have much in common—we get used to them, too used to them. It is a sad lot for either man or song when we despair, not because we do not possess, but because we have possessed over-long; the very substance of our lives is the sweet and immortal restlessness with which we await the unexpected turn in a song and with which we look into the eyes of new men and new years. . . .

They had become accustomed to Nicholas and the idea that he was going to marry Lenke. The father looked forward to this happy event with the calm joyousness of maturity, and the girl regarded it as a reward for good behavior, dutifulness and obedience. Not that she loved Nicholas from a sheer sense of duty and obligation. There are children—you must have met them—who are actually made happy by the thought that they have done their domestic duties well; those who are so dependent as to measure their happiness on

another's yard-stick; who are contented through the contentment of their elders or betters; who have not yet developed a critical understanding of their own emotions; these—though I call them children, there are grown-up people among them—are the loyal servants, the so-called incomparable wives, and the ones who, when they want to find out whether they are happy or not, look into another's eyes for the answer.

And so Lenke Rimmer learned from her father's eyes that as a matter of fact she was happy and that she loved Nicholas. She was satisfied with this vicarious assurance; her narrow little soul did not yearn for more. And as she stood on a chair in "my daughter's room," trying to drive a nail into the wall where the portrait of Frederick Schiller was to hang (a souvenir from her Dresden teachers), she said to her father, who was vainly trying to decipher the autographs on her fan:

"You see, father, the room will look a little

more homelike with some pictures on the wall. . . . In the fall I shall fly out of it, anyhow."

Maria, the poor relation, stood in the background and shook her head disapprovingly. All that she could make out of it was that hers would be the duty of quarreling with the carpenters in the new apartment while the young couple were on their honeymoon in Italy. It was a genuine gratification to her to single out the moment which meant pleasure to her rich kinsman as one of inconvenience to herself. She could not possibly enjoy anything with them simultaneously. She wanted to be left to herself with her joys and her miseries. In either case, she felt that she was a martyr and, after all, that was the goal.

"What do you say to that, Maria?" asked Mr. Rimmer, his face beaming. "Did you hear what she said?"

"Yes."

"She'll fly out, she'll go away. . . . And she

says it as if it were the most natural thing to do—the little rascal!"

The girl laughed and the old man looked up at her, smiling happily.

"You are going to leave me and you can even laugh over it?"

Quite unexpectedly Maria put in: "What do you want her to do? Do you want her to cry over it?"

They looked at her for a moment and then both began to laugh. Maria left the room hurriedly, slamming the door behind her and once safe in the hall, wept pitifully. She felt offended, consequently she was happy.

The girl took hold of Frederick Schiller by his gilded frame, placed him against the wall and bowing with utmost seriousness, she said: "Hello, Freddie!"

CHAPTER III

The young man at the station who had escorted the ladies to the cab stood there for a moment or two looking after them as they were driven away, then turned up the collar of his overcoat and directed his steps toward the Kerepesi Avenue. In the neighborhood of the Slovak Church, he turned into a small side street, then into a still smaller one, and stopped only when he arrived in front of Kore's Pastry Shop.

Even the poorest of men would have felt at home in Kore's Pastry Shop; although cheap Kore tried bravely to give his place an air of elegance by the display of several highly ornate gilded signs. But its shabbiness could not be disguised. Neither was any one deceived by the use of such high-sounding words as "Confiseri" and "Conditorei." Kore's shop reminded one of a

gypsy decking himself out in gay colored rags. The gypsy is still a gypsy as the shop is still the shabby shop of Kore the old candy vender, who had scraped together a little money hawking his wares on the street corners; the shop where only the most insignificant of the would-be actors at the near-by Actors' Academy, and only the most impecunious of the district's law students made rendezvous for afternoon tea.

As Nicholas entered, the bell rang over the door and Mr. Kore, spectacled and absorbed in the morning newspaper, looked up from behind the counter, surprised. Surprised because it was quite unusual for any one, customer or caller, to come in at ten o'clock in the morning.

When Kore finally realized that it was a customer, at least a possible customer, he took off his spectacles and went forward to meet young Nicholas. Kore, dressed all in white, presented really a most refreshing appearance. You may say what you please of the black dress-suit, of its

dignity and respectability, but there is nothing that can equal white if you are going to stand behind the counter of a pastry shop. Mr. Kore knew this, knew that white is a symbol of cleanliness and he made it a point never to appear in anything but the most immaculate linen. And he wore his shop clothes as if they were priestly garments—those of a very pious priest of some very ritualistic religion. He walked about ceremoniously with a set smile on his serious old face as if to say: "You don't understand the portent of all this; you do not realize to whom you are talking, nor why I condescend to reply."

One may safely say that the true pastry cook is either born to this priestly manner or assumes it. Mr. Kore, owing to his stature, could only have put it on with his white vestments. His voice was benevolent and paternal as he smiled at Nicholas and said:

"I think I know the purpose of your visit, Counselor Chathy."

Nicholas answered pleasantly:

"I think hardly, my good Kore."

"I most certainly do."

"Well, we shall see. . . . "

Nicholas took off his overcoat and sat down at a table, an iron table that pretended to be marble, and ordered a glass of liqueur.

Ah, now the situation began to assume a more promising aspect inasmuch as liqueur was the most expensive item on Kore's menu. He hurried behind the counter and reached for a bottle on one of the shelves where a number of flasks were grouped in a brilliant array, arranged according to color.

"That's different," he said, in his most ingratiating, professional tone as he carefully poured out just the required quantity into a small glass, thinking all the time that if he were alone now he would lick off the drop that usually lingers on the rim of the bottle after the glass is filled. He placed the liqueur before his customer; then he

waited. Nicholas smiled at him and motioning to the chair at the opposite side of the table, invited him to sit down.

"Let me talk a little plain common sense to you, Mr. Kore."

The shopkeeper laughed.

"There you are; you see I was not mistaken after all."

"You are right, this time. It's about Riza I want to talk to you."

"I thought so. Well, then," he continued, the smile fading from his face, "it will be better, Counselor, if you stop right where you are. That is the one subject in the world I don't wish to talk about. Riza wanted it the way it is and I am not responsible if she chooses to go to her ruin."

"But you see . . ."

"Don't say a word, Counselor. I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but it's better not to discuss the matter at all. It leads to nowhere. All you can accomplish is to make me even more

angry than I am and more unbending. The case is quite clear. Riza took a mean advantage of my confidence in her. She stole. Let them lock her up. I am not going to get my three hundred florins back anyhow. So why not let the State come and lock her up? That's what the State is for. All the policemen you see hanging around on the streets are there to lock up the Rizas who steal from poor men like me. If it had been a Rothschild who stole my money . . . I don't say —perhaps I'd get it back again, and everything would be all right. Kore is not the man to send a poor, depraved creature to prison out of sheer revenge. Kore has a heart and he can forgive—of course, if he gets his money back. But that's how it is in this world, Counselor, the Rothschild, who could return the money, does not steal; and Riza steals though she can not return it."

Nicholas made an effort to stem this flood of words.

"But look here, Mr. Kore—"

The candy-maker's fist came down on the table with a bang.

"You are the sixth man who comes and tries to persuade me to let Riza off. One wants me to let her go because I am a Christian; the other says I ought to have a heart and not let Riza sink into immorality in prison atmosphere, for she may yet be saved if she goes to the Province somewhere. Then the women come and tell me I shall not get my money back anyhow, so what's the use of prosecuting the girl? That she'll work and pay me back, little by little. But you, Counselor, you're an intelligent, a learned man; do you not think it's a most impertinent thing to say to a man who has lost three hundred florins in such a way? Why should I have a heart, as long as she had none when she stole the money I worked so hard for, stole it from my cash drawer? Am I to be a good Christian just to let her do the same thing with other employers as well? Isn't it much more of a Christian act if I save society from such

a criminal? And that she'll pay me back; that I should wait till she gets a job and pays me back little by little. Bah! Do you think she stole in order to repay it? And what security can she offer me that she will return the money? A promissory note? Don't you think that'd be a little ridiculous? Whoever heard of a thief giving a promissory note for the money he stole? I beg your pardon, sir, they are all bubbling over with kindness and forgiveness where *my* money is concerned; they're all good Christians, all of a sudden, and they all have faith in Riza, faith that she'll pay me back in monthly installments. It's utterly ridiculous. . . . It gets one's goat to think of it. Even if I had had any intention of letting her off, I'd push her back into her cell now just because they all want to teach me Christianity, and because they're all so damned generous with poor Kore's money!"

The pastry-maker ended his tirade and blinked angrily. He had unburdened his heart, though

he would have liked to add another word or two. He rose instead, went back behind the counter and picked up the paper he had been reading, but he could not make head or tail of any of the thousands of words in it. His heart was full of anger, overflowing with a sense of his petty wrongs, and with the prominence of the one great event of his uneventful life. Perhaps he even enjoyed it. The little tradesman who had been exploited, persecuted and robbed for thirty-five years by all who were in authority—the landlords, the health departments, the police when they caught him at night in the cafés selling his sugared figs stuck on sticks—who at last, after many years of struggle, had acquired a shop of his own, paid taxes, had a vote, was an employer of help, had become a "Mister." Why should he begin now by forgiving the waitress, whom he had liked so much that he had even trusted her with the cash drawer, and who had repaid him for his confidence by stealing the three hundred florins he had intended to take

to the bank the following morning? . . . This, the first sum he had been able to save; perhaps the cornerstone of a larger, a more elegant pastry shop somewhere in the inner city—his whole fortune, his future. . . .

He looked sulkily into the paper and considered Nicholas his enemy, who, by accepting the defense of the girl, had assumed a sinister importance in his eyes. Indeed, whoever came to speak to him in behalf of the girl, Kore looked upon as his enemy; he suspected everybody of connivance, of trying to catch him off his guard. They were all eager to persuade him to forgive the girl; and should he do so, they would all be laughing at him and would forget the laudations they now so eloquently showered upon him. He felt something like the voter who is praised and made much of before the election but who becomes a nobody again, immediately he has cast his vote. He is a friend, a helper, a patriot before the election, but after it is over: "Sorry, the Senator is

out," and "No, he is busy just now." The eternal hatred of small and selfish men was being brewed within him by the sound of conciliatory speech. Hatred was the only satisfaction he could win from all his past grievances and the exploitations to which he had been subject.

All this was quite clear to Nicholas and he felt that speech, no matter how eloquent, would be vain in the circumstances. Slowly he rose and for a moment watched the angry Kore, then shrugging his shoulders, he said:

"I'll come around some other time. What do I owe you? Some other time when you're in a pleasanter frame of mind, Mr. Kore. . . ."

The shopkeeper murmured something to the effect that it would be of no use. But since he was about to collect for the liqueur, his anger could not make him keep his seat. He came forward with hand outstretched for the money, he even gave Nicholas a lift with his coat. Then suddenly something occurred to him:

"Do you know," he said with a wicked grin, "that if this girl Riza had happened to be an ugly, old woman, not even the dog would worry about her. . . . The gentlemen are coming because she is pretty and young. . . . I know what's what. . . ."

Nicholas gave him a look of contempt. Then something occurred to *him*. A sudden thought flashed a gleam of light upon the dark soul of Mr. Kore—that there was something else there than the theft; that there was something else there than the defrauded proprietor. That behind the loss of the money there was something quite irrelevant to the theft itself, something frightfully illuminating. This man, this pastry cook all in white, did not utter merely the angry protestations of the outraged capitalist, but the hatred, the spite of a hundred times repulsed, a hundred times ridiculed old man in love—

They stood facing each other. The silence was profound. Then old Kore cast down his eyes,

and as if to scatter some unpleasant mood, he exclaimed with all the venom there was in him, yet pretending to be very calm:

"You may tell her, sir, that I am not going to withdraw the complaint, not the slightest intention . . . I am not going to withdraw the complaint. . . . You can tell her . . ."

But the lawyer continued to stare at him curiously—as if a new phase of life had opened before him—with the painful gaze of the young and pure-hearted, a gaze that opens the eyes wide in moments of bitter revelation. Only the old and hardened can long withstand this child-like stare.

It is to the credit of Mr. Kore that he again cast his eyes down. And thus, a customer who had just entered the shop and found the two men in this attitude, might very naturally have thought that one of them had caught the other red-handed, and that the culprit, during this fleeting half minute, was preoccupied with shaming

off all the shame that wretched humanity is entitled to.

He could very naturally have thought—I say—but he did not think anything at the moment, because he was a simple man and besides he had only come to buy a few cheap cakes to peddle around in small cafés. He said "Good morning," and opened the door again for Nicholas to pass out.

And not until after half a dozen steps did Nicholas notice that he had not turned to the right, as he had intended to turn, but to the left, as he had not intended to turn. But it is no wonder, for confusion is quite natural after one has gazed into an immeasurably deep and mysterious darkness.

CHAPTER IV

THE air of the long prison corridors was fragrant with the aroma of roast chicken; under the ancient arches pleasant odors floated. For the first time in many years, a great dinner was in preparation,—fancy cakes, ice-cream, to say nothing of the chicken. Old Rimmer was a Puritan as far as food was concerned, and boiled beef was the most extravagant dish he would allow on his table. For only the most distinguished guests, honored visitors, would he permit murder in the chicken coop. To-day a very distinguished person was dining with old Rimmer. A young girl in white, whose lovely face still bore traces of fatigue from long travel, but who felt extremely happy and most comfortable; such a feeling as you have when you are first home from a long stay among strangers.

At the head of the table sat old Rimmer, at the lower end, Maria—the northern and southern extremities. The seats to the east and to the west were occupied by two young lovers. Between them passed many warm and affectionate glances, while from the south to north—there was only an icy glare. This came from Maria, and perhaps never before had any one expressed so completely and so compactly all that a poor relation feels under trying circumstances. In this glance there was a sense of injury over what had occurred in the morning—there were sulkiness and pride, but mainly martyrdom; such martyrdom as any famous martyr of the Middle Ages might have envied.

During the luncheon the case of Riza Nagy was discussed. This was Nicholas' first real case. True, it meant nothing financially—but it was a criminal case and might well develop interesting features, such as the newspapers report in vivid detail. This doubtful piece of good luck had

come to Nicholas through his having been a regular patron at the Kore *patisserie* while preparing for his degree; and, as a matter of fact, on the day he took his final examination, the patrons and employees of the shop actually awaited the result in great excitement. A tall, lean, lanky student at the Actors' Academy, who lived in Berkocsis Street, but spent half his life at Kore's shop, actually went to the great building on Parliament Square where Nicholas was being interrogated by the solemn professors of law, and awaited the outcome there. He dared not enter the room where the examination was being held, but loitered around the corridor and button-holed every one that came out:

"I beg your pardon . . . do you know if a chap named Chathy has passed yet?"

"He is under the knife now."

"What are his prospects?"

"Fair enough, I should say."

This went on, time after time, until Nicholas

appeared in the door, flushed and happy, with the heat of battle on his face, smiling at Sebfi as an indication that he had passed.

This episode, as Nicholas told it, pleased Lenke particularly:

"What sort of man is this Sebfi?"

She demanded a detailed description of his person, she wanted to hear all the intimate and characteristic little stories about him, she was interested enough to want to meet him. Because of his shy and simple devotion to Nicholas she, too, liked Sebfi now and wanted to show her gratitude to him one day when she should be Nicholas' wife. He would have to dine with them every Sunday. He interested her too because he was as shabby and poverty stricken as a beggar, and he secretly fascinated her because wherever he was known, he was considered the greatest scoundrel unhung. There was only one thing about him she regretted—Sebfi was not his real name. It had been given him at the Actors' Academy in place

of his German sounding real name, Wund, which translated into Hungarian theatrical equivalent, would be Sebfi.* However, the lanky boy did not object, he was quite satisfied.

This fellow Sebfi occupied such a prominent place in Nicholas' story, because he was in love with Riza Nagy, who at this very moment was awaiting trial at the court-house prison. Here was a very touching romance and Lenke loved to listen to it, though she was not affected by it; she could not regard seriously any love-affair outside the charmed circle of girls dressed all in white and young men in conventional black. The woman who stole did not cause her any emotion, except a passing pity.

"Poor girl," she said, "I should like to see her get off without a prison sentence, but only because it is your case . . . Counselor. . . ."

Through the large window, perhaps the only

*Sebfi—"The wounded one," literally "Woundson." Translator.

one in this great house without bars, the pleasant rays of the January noon sun shone brightly.

There they sat eating, happy and calm, content in the winter sunshine, all of them deeply engrossed in the history of Riza Nagy. They looked on the case of this girl criminal as their own, as if Riza were not a stranger to them, but a sort of black sheep member of this honest family. It being Nicholas' first case, they were all trying eagerly to find some mitigating circumstance; even the austere Maria refrained from passing judgment though she was always ready enough with her decisions.

"Perhaps we could go and see the man who accuses her," she said quite wisely.

Nicholas answered courteously: "I have been to see him."

"And . . .?"

This from Lenke, with a rising inflection. One has to admit that Lenke was a trifle cruel in what she was that moment thinking. She did not wish

the charge to be withdrawn. That would have meant that the girl would go free, and Nicholas would not get a chance to deliver the great speech that was to establish his reputation. However, only the metallic ring of the curt "and" disclosed her anxiety.

"I went to see the man," said Nicholas, "but he refused even to discuss it."

The lawyer in old Rimmer was struggling to assert itself.

"How old is the girl?"

"Nineteen."

"What?" Lenke exclaimed in surprise. "As young as that? I thought she was an old, homely-looking thing."

"Not at all. Quite the contrary. She is really very pretty. Perhaps her misfortune is due to that."

Riza Nagy was no longer merely a client. Suddenly she had become a human being.

"You must tell us all about her," said Lenke

with childish expectation on her face, such as a little girl might wear when you promise to tell her a story. She settled down to it, so to speak, drawing her chair nearer the table, and waited for Nicholas to begin.

"Now?" asked Mr. Rimmer, fearing the story might turn out one unfit for his daughter's ears. "Did you say her beauty caused her misfortune? Why, it is a romance, a dime novel . . ."

He threw a further glance at Nicholas as much as to say: How about the propriety of the narrative? The young man smiled.

"This girl," he said, "was the apple of the eye of the Kore *patisserie*. She came from a provincial town, Miskolcz, I think, where she was cashier at a night-café. Kore said, at the time, that he would never engage a girl unless she came from a military town; that only such girls know how to handle patrons properly, especially the class that visits his confectionery shop. And I remember his showing us letters weeks before in which the new

waitress announced the time of her arrival. It seems amusing, but all of us, the regular habitués, were feverish with expectation, waiting for the new girl. Up to then old Kore was alone in the shop and we had to accept the creamy cakes, the foamy tarts, which are his specialties, from his rough hands and not always as clean as they might be, either. So you can imagine how eagerly those poor little actor-students were looking forward to the arrival of the girl; especially since Kore declared that she was beautiful. He had first met her, it seems, at the time of the Exhibition, where she was working at the Champagne Pavilion, and he admitted that it was not in the capacity of customer that he made her acquaintance, but as one selling cakes in the same high-class establishment. But this is irrelevant. As I said, we were all quite excited, not only the boys, but the girls, as well, who come to Kore's regularly. The girls, you know, who study in little, pseudo-dramatic schools, not the real stu-

dents of the Academy, and who looked up to Miss Bella, of the chorus at the People's Theater, with no end of reverence. They were anxious to have a girl about the place; some one they could gossip with; some one with whom they could leave their love letters; some one to whom they could confide, could tell their troubles. And then one day old Kore startled us all by reading a letter directing him to send money for her fare as she was to start in two days. And she did start—although Kore only sent her half the money she asked for—and one nice day she really did arrive."

"Have a cigar," said Mr. Rimmer, offering one.

"No," exclaimed Lenke, taking it from her father. "Let him go on with the story."

She would not give him even time to light the cigar. Riza had captured her fancy, and Lenke wanted every detail, just as it happened.

"All right," said Nicholas, "I am going to tell you everything. Just a little patience."

"So she arrived," said the girl, with wide open eyes and leaning on the table with her elbow. "What happened then? Or wait. Go on from there where she entered the store . . ."

Nicholas lighted his cigar, secretly, in the meanwhile.

"She arrived," he continued, "and that afternoon there were so many of us at Kore's, that some drank their coffee standing in front of the counter, where the new waitress, in snow-white apron, stood, smiling sweetly and evidently pleased with the sensation her appearance had created. The few strangers who happened to drop in at Kore's that day found the place rather queer. Naturally they could not understand why it was so quiet and yet so festive in the confectionery shop, when usually it resounded with the noise of debates, the sounds of shrill laughter, of shouting and quarreling. I remember one afternoon Sebfi recited the "Madman" from *Petofi* with such effect that one of the strangers wanted to thrash

him because a lady dressed in brown became hysterical with fright and left without paying. Of course old Kore was half frantic at this and we had to entreat him not to drive Sebfi from his shop for ever, as was his intention. On this day, however, no such untoward thing happened. There was general silence, the patrons talked in whispers not only in honor of Miss Riza, but also because we were all talking about Miss Riza."

"And what was she like?" Lenke wanted to know.

"Very pretty. Even more than that. She was prettier than we expected. She had thick black hair and there was something Bohemian about her personality . . . and again she gave one the impression of being a sort of home-loving, pleasant creature, not too tall and not too short, so that if she did not command respect, neither could one look down upon her. And she fitted in exceedingly well behind the counter. The appearance of the whole place was altered by the fact

that she was moving about here and there among the pastries. Up to then—the Lord knows why—we looked on the pastry with a degree of suspicion. A man, you know, ought not to touch such creamy delicacies. But now in Miss Riza's hands the pies, covered with fine powdered sugar, and the fluffy custardy cakes became more appetizing, more desirable in every way. You could not fancy a more beautiful sight than Miss Riza walking toward you bearing a shiny tray with a cream covered cup of chocolate and a sugared slice of cake on it. And in the imagination of the sentimental boys and foolish girls, the folds of Miss Riza's cheap skirt and the still cheaper lace on her waist and apron, were likewise creamy and custardy delicacies. Every one felt it to be so, but only Sebfi could give expression to it and he voiced the common feeling when he said, 'Miss Riza identifies herself with the shop.' This reverence, it amounted almost to that, did not last long, however. In a few days

the confectionery shop resumed its old appearance, again the same crowds were seated at the same tiny tables and again the old discussions were resumed as to whether Zacconi or Novelli was the greater actor, or whether both of them were but the shadows of old Salvini, of whom the passing generation was telling tales of wonder. And slowly Miss Riza too, became one of the crowd. A week had hardly passed before she knew everybody's name, knew their troubles, their dreams and longings—in short, she knew the individuals themselves, for they were merely the earthly encasements of such hopes and dreams. Sebfi it was who said that and he made quite a hit with the speech at the time. 'We lunch on longings and for supper we eat dreams,' he said, 'still we manage to live.' "

"It's nice," said Lenke. "Poets used to write such things in their verse. Is Sebfi a poet?"

The severe Maria deemed it proper to put in a word here; a touch of humor into the story.

"A versificator," she said softly.

At which, quite unexpectedly everybody laughed. Even a less sensitive soul than Aunt Maria would have realized that it was not at the humor they were laughing, but at her. And now she was perfectly happy, as she could again feel offended and she did—mortally in fact—so she arose and left the room, slamming the door behind her.

"In short," Nicholas continued, as if to say that Maria's resentment need not be taken seriously, "in short, Miss Riza soon became acclimatized. About this time Sebfi came to my rooms one night where I was studying with a friend for my exams, and asked me to go for a walk with him as he had something very important to tell me. I immediately suspected what it was all about. He dragged me along as far as the Danube Corso and there he confessed that he had fallen in love with Miss Riza so thoroughly, so terrifyingly, in fact, that he had not the courage to

tell her of it. He was working out all sorts of plans and he told me all of them. He confided to me first that he intended marrying her; that she was such a good and worthy girl that one could not approach her with any idea other than marriage. Still Sebfi was a circumspect soul who could be counted on to look well before he leaped; so he had written to a friend in Miskolcz—where Riza came from, you remember—a friend who happened to be in the chorus at the theater there, and inquired as to her record, her past. He had mailed the letter and was expecting an answer the next day.

"A queer feeling came over me just then—something that rather startled me. Sebfi was talking away excitedly, saying many things that had no meaning at all. But at the bottom of all he said was the conviction, the determination, that whatever the answer might be, it would hardly alter his decision. As we walked along the river bank, scarcely noticing whether we were at the Chain

Bridge or at Petofi Square, he chattered incessantly and it seemed to me that all his talk was but a denial of the answer he expected from Miskolcz, as if he suspected it would not be favorable so far as Miss Riza's past performances were concerned."

Old Rimmer drew long on his cigar, then coughed aloud. The story had reached an interesting turn but he was afraid it might be too interesting for his little Lenke.

There was a moment's silence. Nicholas smiled again and turned toward the old gentleman, softly saying:

"It's a very simple story; you need not be afraid of it."

Lenke opened wide her eyes.

"Why," she said, "I don't see why any one should be afraid of it."

"Well . . ." began her father as he put the cigar again between his lips, and shrugged his shoulders. The girl, with sparkling eyes, was

awaiting the continuation of the story, drumming on the table with her tiny fist.

"Go on, Nicholas!"

And Nicholas went on:

"It was a beautiful night. Now and again we halted and looked across to Buda. But Sebfi, although he has a poetic soul, said nothing about the beauty of the night. All he did was to look at Mount Gellert, so long, so persistently and so penetratingly, as though he might have wished to bore a tunnel through it with his gaze.

"He was greatly excited. 'I can't sleep,' he said, 'I can't sleep.' Then he related, rapidly but disjointedly, how he had fallen in love with Miss Riza.

"It happened, one day, that he did not have money enough for lunch. Then again, on another occasion, the same embarrassing situation confronted him. As a matter of fact, Sebfi never had any money for lunch, yet he did lunch now and then. At times when he had nothing to eat, he

went to the confectionery shop as early as three o'clock in the afternoon, having credit there, and consumed coffee and cake. One afternoon when he appeared at the shop at two-thirty and took his seat at one of the iron tables, it happened that he was the only customer in the place and so he picked up a conversation with the girl. She was so genuinely sympathetic as she inquired about his career, his affairs and everything relating to him, that Sebfi, who was more forlorn than a stray dog, was on the verge of tears. But Miss Riza's kindness was not yet exhausted. Toward the end of the conversation she told him in a whisper that if he should find himself in very straitened circumstances, she—this white-aproned and white-laced waitress—would be pleased to lend him a few florins, as she happened to have a little money saved up. At this juncture Sebfi suddenly arose, ran out of the place and—as he told me—dashed along Kerepesi Avenue, not with any goal in mind, but solely because he was so terribly

ashamed of himself. However, from this day on he discovered that he was in love with this beautiful, simple, pure-hearted girl. He even discovered some strange sparkle in her eyes, which he was pleased to call the secret light, revealing hidden passions. And then Sebfi simply went mad. I say simply and frankly he went mad, just as all similarly exalted souls go mad as a rule, without warning; and I should like to add: without any real emotions. He began to comb his hair and to compose his tie with the utmost neatness, both of which had hitherto been characterized by artistic disorder. He shaved often, a fact that certainly revealed the beginning of a new life with him. He walked a great deal alone, and for a long time tried to hide his emotion even from himself; but when he could suppress it no longer he chose me as the one with whom to deposit his secret, on the bank of the Danube. He said he had selected me because I did not belong to his world. I was not an artist, he said, but 'a sober citizen

whose mind was cool enough to pass judgment upon an undertaking of this sort, according to the laws of life.' He knew that his own friends would have advised him to marry her immediately, just as they always without hesitation married these girls, swept away by too vivid impressions. But Sebfi's soul was crowded with doubts. He was something more than his friends, more valuable material, he was a thinking man."

Now father and daughter interrupted him at once.

"And what did you advise him to do?" asked the girl.

"And what did the letter from Miskolcz say?" inquired the father.

Nicholas answered them in turn.

"I must confess that I didn't advise him to do what I should have done in his place."

"Why not?"

"Because I couldn't conceive of a situation in which I'd fall in love with a creature like

that . . . and, in short, I would have begun with the argument that one does not marry a girl of her class. With me the possibility of such a thing is unthinkable. But as I looked at him and reviewed his life I was flooded with compassion. I told him to go and find out whether the girl was worthy of a respectable man, and if convinced of it, why, to marry her, so long as he loved her so dearly. After all, we are living in this world, not to avoid gossiping tongues about us, but to be happy. The world will go on gossiping anyhow, and the great millstone will go on grinding good names and good reputations unceasingly, as it does; so why should a poor soul like Sebfi sacrifice his life's happiness out of regard for conventions that society has established for the upper classes?"

"What about Miskolcz?" insisted the old gentleman.

"Yes, Miskolcz. . . ."

"What was in the letter?"

"The letter arrived the next day. That's where the tragedy begins."

"Tragedy?"

"Yes."

"Was the answer as bad as that?"

"No, it was worse than that! It was as bad as bad could be. It disclosed that Miss Riza had been the so-called center of the town's night life. It was she who had put the little café she worked in on its feet. The officers of the garrison used to patronize it on her account and she used to drink champagne with them until morning. Fathers wanted her arrested because their sons, college boys, spent their money and went into debt on her account at the Café Mexico. Men-about-town wept and fathers and mothers rejoiced when they learned she was going to leave. The proprietor's eyes were red with tears and he offered her a handsome sum if she would stay on. But Riza refused all inducements, insisting that she was going to Budapest to turn over a new

leaf and begin anew. Sebfi's friend, the chorus-man, added that the first lieutenant—that certain first lieutenant, you know, whom Riza specially favored—escorted her to the station and offered to take her back to the city, take her out of the café and furnish her with everything in the world she could wish for. But she refused to listen. She protested that she wanted to go to the capital, make a fresh start and marry a poor man, a laborer even, for she had had enough of 'this sort' of life."

Lenke's father was impressed.

"She isn't so bad then, after all," he said.

And Lenke added with hearty sincerity:

"That's very good; that's very nice indeed."

And Nicholas continued.

"Yes—to us; but it was neither good nor nice to poor Sebfi. The end of the story he didn't take into account; he saw only the beginning, which happened to be very discouraging from his point of view. On the third and fourth day he

looked me up again, but he did not ask my advice. He only came to pour out his soul. It was quite decided that he would ask her to marry him. That sort of information is not sought as a factor to govern one's decision, but merely that the infatuated person may torture himself with it; that, knowing everything, he may love the more passionately and suffer the more. . . ."

The servant girl appeared at the door. She wanted to clear the table. They all arose and went into Lenke's room, the neat white, "my daughter's room." Here the story was continued. Seeing the interest it had aroused, Nicholas went on with even more gusto. And Riza's history fascinated him also as he recalled the incidents, piecing them one by one into the narrative.

He sat down in the corner of the sofa and continued:

"One nice day the great event came to pass. In the forenoon Sebfi put on his Sunday best, got a shave and with the powder still decorating his

chin, he went to the confectionery shop. Stepping directly up to Riza, who was arranging the fresh cakes on a glass shelf in the show-window, he said in a tone half gay, half earnest:

"'Miss Riza, may I have your attention in a very serious matter?'

"We daily patrons of the shop know all these details. We talked about them for weeks with the girl and with Sebfi, even with old Kore, who showed a certain indifference to the affair. . . . Riza smiled at Sebfi; she dusted the powdered sugar from her hands and they sat down at one of the tables in the deserted shop—old Kore was not in at the time. And Sebfi confessed his love to her and told her he wanted to make her his wife. She let him talk, listening with interest and smiling constantly. But she made no sign, gave no answer even at the end of his speech when he said: 'And now I am waiting for your reply, Miss Riza.' In her silence Sebfi read quite clearly that his life would be unhappy to the last

of his days. There are times when one gets a sudden glimpse of one's whole life, like the flash of a searchlight illuminating the surface of the sea for an instant, or lighting up a narrow street in the darkness. In that moment Sebfi was so certain of an unfavorable answer that his eagerness for an immediate reply was extinguished.

"So he quickly added: 'All right, Miss Riza; all right, you needn't answer now. Think it over, consider it for a day or two.' The poor fellow didn't say this as a matter of form; he was quite certain now that Riza had no inclination to love him, and, even worse than that, no disposition at all to become his wife, though this would have satisfied him for the time being. Until he had heard it from her own lips, there would at least be some hope. But Riza did not answer him immediately nor directly.

" 'Let's not talk about this, Mr. Sebfi.'

"But as Sebfi persisted, she, very seriously, began to explain to him that he was too young, that

he was not earning a penny, that the whole thing was so ridiculous that she would laugh but for the fact that she respected his feelings and never laughed at a sincere declaration of love. Rich and high-born women, she told him, would laugh at poor beggars who were in love with them; but poor and simple girls—never. As a matter of fact, she was deeply impressed; she couldn't be otherwise after hearing Sebfi declare his love. But, however considerately she put it, however prettily she dressed it up, it was a perfectly bona fide refusal, a serious and ultimate rejection, such as would stop any man of self-respect from talking for at least a month or two. And Sebfi was full of self-respect, as he used to put it. So he took his hat, bade her a courteous good morning and left the shop with an air he used to employ when he played the jilted lover at students' performances. But there was no pretense about it; he really wanted to play the elegant gentleman before the girl he loved. And this exit was the

very best Sebfi was capable of, on the stage or off."

Lenke, sitting snug and comfortable on a cushion, became impatient for developments.

"And what was the end of it?" she asked.

"Just that."

"How so. . . . Just that? What did Sebfi do?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't he try again?"

"Of course he did."

"He asked her again to marry him?"

"No, not exactly that. He kept off the subject. But his love lasted and he continued to go to the shop every day, though he sighed more than he ate and looked less at the cakes than at the girl. The whole crowd knew everything down to the smallest detail. From that time on, however, I was no longer his confidant. Miss Bella, the chorus girl, succeeded me. Why did he seek out some one else? Because now his poor heart

had no use for any advice except that which agreed with its own counsel. Things had taken such a turn that sober, conservative judgment no longer availed. He would walk up and down Kerepesi Avenue with Miss Bella and confide his troubles to her. The girl faithfully reported to Riza, but that was all she could do in his behalf.

"One night, about one o'clock, while I was asleep some one rang my bell. My landlady was frightened to death. She didn't dare to open the door; it was as much as she could do to look through the keyhole. Sebfi, who was the caller, lit a match in order to identify himself. To this day she talks about this visit with terror. He stood there as pale and excited as a madman. She could see that even by the light of the match. Thoroughly frightened, she ran to wake me. She said the actor was there but she thought he had gone crazy for he had no hat and was as pale as the wall. We let Sebfi in. He fell on his knees and began to weep bitterly. Then suddenly he

raised his head and the actor in him broke out as he said in a painful voice, softly but bitterly.

" 'Counselor, the police took Riza in charge tonight.'

"It gave me a shock, too.

" 'Come with me please,' he pleaded. 'She sent some one to me with word to come to you and ask you to defend her, to be her lawyer. . . .'

"I dressed hurriedly, got a cab, took Sebfi home to get his hat, then drove to police headquarters. On the way there Sebfi stammered something about three hundred florins that Riza had stolen from the cash drawer at Kore's. She had even bought a ticket to Vienna. They did not find the money. Then two detectives came and took her away from her lodgings. . . ."

Nicholas rose. The beautiful noon sunshine was smiling less vividly by now. In winter one has but an hour or two of the joy of it. There had been enough of the story for the day. And besides, Nicholas had to go.

"Have supper with us," said Lenke, and looked at her father.

The old gentleman smiled happily.

"Yes, come back in the evening, Nicholas. I shall have a cab here to take you home at eleven o'clock. It is rather unpleasant, the walk from here at night."

Nicholas bowed slightly. "Thank you."

"And are you going to continue the story?" asked Lenke.

"Yes, if you like."

"You'll come early . . . won't you?"

"I shall be here at about seven."

Old Rimmer tactfully left the room; he always did whenever Nicholas came or was about to go. Let the young people give each other a kiss! And they were left alone in the little white room. Nicholas took the young girl in his arms tenderly, and looked in her eyes. Lenke said very seriously:

"But you . . . you had never anything to do with this Miss Riza?"

Nicholas was surprised: "I?"

"Yes, you. You know, when you told the story of Sebfi taking you to the river bank for a walk, my heart stopped beating. I thought he suspected you . . . that he thought you were in love with that girl. . . . For you know if he had thought so . . . then . . . I, too, would think so now. . . ."

Then she blushed and her face grew even more serious.

"Go, go," she said, "go now; I am ashamed of myself."

CHAPTER V

The evening was hushed and white. The fields under their pall of snow slept with the calm of death and the big house kept them silent company. But the big house did not sleep. Heavy and still it lay, yet the dullest must have sensed its wakefulness, its atmosphere of suppressed excitement. Behind every barred window, wide-eyed men gazed, from every cell their sighs escaped; or so it seemed as you stood in the snow covered courtyard. And as you paused in the midst of seeming composure the feeling would lay hold of you, that in another moment, suddenly everything in this huge pile would resolve into disorder, the heavy doors and barred windows break from their moorings, the long corridors burst with sound as if some latent force had won its freedom and with it released a storming mob of angry prisoners.

But no one of this contented group sitting comfortably around the dinner table thought of such a thing. Not old Rimmer, for he was accustomed and hardened to the atmosphere; not his daughter, for she had neither knowledge nor experience to prompt her. Possibly Nicholas might have sensed the hidden possibilities, might have shuddered under the oppressive thought—but Nicholas was in love.

While a friendly lamp poured its benediction of light upon them, they ate and talked and laughed as if at some gay country-house-party. In the fulness of their joy, they were unmindful of the tortured souls about them; the locked cells; the barred windows. Three happy and heedless hearts in the midst of a world of suffering.

Nicholas was talking quietly and at ease, as one who has no cause to hurry and who is not particularly excited by the story he is relating.

"I left off," he said, "where we took a cab at night and went to see Riza at the police head-

quarters, where the authorities had just finished questioning her. They made her sign her confession and then I was allowed to speak to her. But it was no use trying to make her tell me her story. Her look was dark and sullen and she said that she was very tired and wanted me to leave her alone. It was in vain I explained to her that the sooner we began our efforts in her interest, the sooner she'd be free; she would not listen to me. She actually asked me to go, so nothing was accomplished except that she said she wanted me to appear for her and agreed to see me the next day. A few days passed, however, without anything important happening. Then they transferred her to the state's attorney jail and there I saw her again. In the meanwhile Sebfi was running around the city like a lunatic. He wanted to raise the three hundred florins that would save Riza, but with all his hustling he only collected twenty florins and in doing that he exhausted his credit and paid a horrible rate

of interest. Twenty miserable florins that cost him forty the minute he had them in his hand, thanks to a couple of usurers. We gave the twenty florins to the jail inspector to use for Riza's food and then on Wednesday, after I met Lenke at the railway station, I went to Kore's to see if I couldn't make some impression on the old man, but he wouldn't listen. It was all in vain. When I told Sebfi of Kore's stubbornness the poor boy began to weep bitterly. It was no use, and he had to resign himself to the tragic fact that poor Riza was lodged in prison on account of three hundred miserable florins, a sum that none of our crowd, or all of us put together, could raise in the entire city. I must confess that I myself made an effort to get the money, not because of the girl, but rather on account of poor Sebfi, but I, too, was unsuccessful. Perhaps, if I had needed it as desperately as Sebfi did, I could have found it somewhere. The next day I saw Riza at the prison."

For the first time Nicholas' audience of two began to move about uneasily in their chairs, for at this crisis, Riza Nagy entered the story as a participating character. Up to now she had played a silent rôle and the story had touched her only indirectly. Here was the moment of closer acquaintance.

"Did she receive you?" asked Lenke.

"She did."

"And wasn't she angry this time?"

"Not at all."

"What did she say?"

Nicholas was silent for a moment and then seemed to brace himself as if for an important disclosure.

"She said something quite terrible."

At this Lenke stiffened, as if a cold wind had blown suddenly through the room where they sat. And poor Riza's story hung suspended for a moment in the chill atmosphere of expectancy.

"She began by saying," Nicholas managed to

continue, "that she had tasted prison life once before and for a similar offense. That was at Kolozsvar in Transylvania. But there she had some rich friends who settled up for her promptly and she got off with little delay. 'But now,' she said, 'I am stuck.' She was very queer and behaved in such a strange manner that I hardly recognized her. She was always very pleasant at the confectionery shop. Her clean white apron, her snow-white collar were part of her personality, almost as much as her pleasant smile and flattering attention. But in the prison she seemed to have discarded all her graces, as she had her white apron and her snowy collar."

Lenke again interrupted him:

"Was she sad?"

". . . No." Nicholas hesitated.

"Was she sulky?"

"No, I can't say she was."

"In what way then was she queer?"

"The Lord only knows. I can't just express

it, compress it into a sentence. She looked at me almost with severity. There was desperation in her beautiful black eyes; a certain wildness in her general appearance. Her hair, which was ordinarily well dressed, had not been combed and a lock or two hung over her forehead in disorder. I realized suddenly that this creature had disappointed me. The real Riza Nagy was not the sweet smiling girl I had known in the shop, but this wild dark woman whose every glance was frenzied with desperation, whose very movement was heavy with revolt. I must confess I was somewhat uneasy about her. But then I reflected that I was acting only in an official capacity, as her attorney, who had no time to make psychological observations and no right to become sentimental over this sudden change. I told her that I had approached the old confectioner. She looked at me piercingly and said: 'Why did you do that?'

"I explained that this was the only thing there was to try in her behalf.

"'And what did the old fellow say?' she demanded.

"I shrugged my shoulders: 'He would not even listen to me.'

"'There you see,' she said triumphantly, as if glad that she knew old Kore better than I did.

"To console her I told her Sebfi was exhausting every effort to raise the necessary amount but up to now without success. To my greater surprise she answered: 'I am disgusted with that Sebfi.'

"'How so?' I said. 'He adores you, he wants to marry you. Even yesterday he said that he had no other aim in life but to free you and marry you, and to save you for a happier life.'

"'I hate him,' she repeated, 'that's why I hate him. I don't want him to come here.'

"I was amazed.

"And then in a somewhat gentler tone, she tried to excuse herself, saying:

"'You see, you needn't judge me too seriously

on that account. He is nothing to me, I don't love him. . . . He hangs on to me, and follows me about, he wants to save me when he knows that he is not wanted. I don't want his life, I don't want the poor fool just because he wants to marry me. Counselor, I am not to be asked in marriage. Not because I am a vagabond and have lived a bad life, but because I am not the sort that wives are made of. I wanted to become some one on my own account. Don't imagine that I have artistic ambitions. Nothing of the kind. I just want to live, really live, to have a say about things, and to become a woman on whom men of importance depend; who dictates, who gives orders.' "

Lenke was listening with keen attention. She was absorbed as young and innocent girls always are in the story of a woman who refuses to live the life of the sheltered; who goes out into the world, to fight and struggle, to conquer and to rule.

"Interesting girl," she whispered softly.

Nicholas acquiesced:

"Interesting. . . ."

"And then?"

He went on with the story:

"And then . . . this surprised me greatly. There was an ache in my heart when I discovered that it had remained for me to find out all this, in the prison, just when it appeared most unlikely that I could get her off. It made a great impression upon me. While she was telling me what she would like to be and do, she stood erect and I could see on her face that she might have won her great desire if she had not stumbled this time. . . . I can even say that at that moment I felt, even under her present handicap she'd manage it somehow. I couldn't see how I was to help her, yet by the way she spoke, the way she looked at me, I got the impression that this girl would find her own road leading out of prison and into the very heart of life."

Now old Rimmer put a question:

"But why did she steal?"

"She even told me that."

"Well?"

"Her plan was to go to Vienna with the stolen money. She counted on two acquaintances there. One was a Hungarian girl who went to Vienna some years ago and was dancing in the ballet there, in a great theater, and the other was an officer whom she met in Arad. She expected to live on the money she had stolen until she found him, then she would ask him to send it back to Kore; and with the help of the girl friend she could get a job on the stage, not because she had any theatrical ambitions, but in order to make acquaintances, and to start from there on the career of triumph she was dreaming so much about."

"Well," said the old man, "that was a very childish cunning on her part."

"No, it was not childish. She was just unlucky. You know she handled the money, she kept the books and she could have run away any

one of a dozen times with that amount without Kore discovering it in time to check up on her. But it happened that this time Kore needed the money to deposit in the bank the following day. Within five minutes everything was discovered and the detectives took her away."

"And didn't they find any of the money?"

"No."

"What did she do with it?"

"She gave an exact accounting of the money. Twenty florins she lent to Miss Bella. Two hundred and thirty florins she paid for a gorgeous dress that she saw in a show window in Vienna Street. She spent a few florins on cabs, and she had about thirty-five florins left to run away with."

"But perhaps . . . they could get the money back for the dress?"

Nicholas smiled.

"Oh no, that can't be done. When the detectives arrested her, she begged to be allowed to

put her things in order. She took the expensive dress and tore it into a thousand shreds. This done, she gave a ten-florin tip to a servant girl in the apartment, sent ten more florins to the janitress and the rest she hurled through the window. Then she walked into the other room and said to the detectives: 'Now we can go, gentlemen.' "

"Interesting girl," again whispered Lenke.

And Nicholas went on:

"When I asked why she did that, she merely shrugged her shoulders and said: 'I don't know. I was crazy.' I explained to her that if she hadn't done this, we could have paid back the greater part of the money to Kore at once, and the rest we could have dug up somehow and she'd have been free. She began to laugh and said: 'It was all the same to me. It didn't succeed, so it didn't succeed. I've tried to get away from this life a number of times, once in a criminal way, and again and again through cleverness and honest work but I never succeed. I was terribly des-

pondent. I said to myself: 'Life won't let me kick myself up from the bottom to the surface of the water. Life presses my head back into the water whenever I try to get to the surface. It seems my fate to drown.'

"This was what she said and she gave me a hostile look, as if I, too, were a member, an atom of that life that always had pressed her back into the depths. I felt very sorry for her."

For a moment he was silent, his expression no longer that of the merely professional interested advocate. Something in his face suggested that he, too, was an actor in this drama, one who had a prominent part in it.

Nicholas had halted in his story as if its course had reached a barrier. There seemed to be a certain unnarrated detail behind his silence. He toyed nervously with the small black cup before him as if undecided whether to tell that certain detail. Then his gaze met that of Lenke.

If he had seen in her eyes only joyous frank-

ness, only the interest of the innocent and unsuspecting, perhaps he never would have completed the story. But what he saw was a challenge, an eager curiosity tinged with suspicion, as if she would say: "You are keeping something from me."

Then in a tone that was almost harsh Nicholas went on:

"She said something then . . . but it's rather foolish . . . and perhaps it would be better if I kept silent about it . . . that is to say . . ."

Lenke did not interrupt him, but she looked at him with evident fear in her lovely clear eyes.

The old gentleman had not sensed any of the drama in all this, so he calmly asked:

"What did she say?"

"She surprised me greatly . . . she said something very stupid. . . ."

And now this from Lenke, her voice toneless:

"What was it she said?"

"She said . . . she loved me."

Lenke closed her eyes. She knew; she had felt this from the very first.

Rimmer laughed cheerfully.

"She loves you?"

"Yes, that is what she said."

"And what did you say to her?"

"I was embarrassed. I told her it was foolish . . . that . . . it had nothing to do with this case and that I should take no cognizance of it . . . that I'd ask a friend of mine to take the case, if this was the situation. . . ."

"And she?"

"Then she began to cry, and to swear by all that's sacred that she'd never mention it again; that she'd be a good girl, if I'd only keep the case and help her get out of prison. . . ."

"And you?"

"I . . . I was very sorry for her . . . and as she promised never to mention it again and to forget all about it . . . I said I'd go on with it."

And as if ashamed of his momentary embarrassment, he added:

"After all, I have nothing to do with her sentiments."

"Exactly," Rimmer agreed pompously.

"And besides," said Nicholas with renewed courage, "I know this method. It is quite frequently adopted with lawyers by their women clients. This girl is all cunning. She said—what she did—because she thought she'd have a stronger influence over me. There are young lawyers who are caught by such baits. But not I."

His calmness returned and he gestured cheerfully.

"She can talk to me . . ."

It was getting late, so Nicholas rose to go without finishing his sentence.

"Wait a minute," said Rimmer, "I'll send to see if your cab has come."

He left the room and Nicholas went over to the

girl and put his arm around her. Lenke said not a word. She only looked up at him, sadly and mutely, as he embraced her.

"Well, what is it?" Nicholas asked.

She did not answer.

"Are you angry?"

"No."

"Well, then?"

She laid her head on his shoulder and sighed. In that sigh she whispered three words that revealed her childish innocence:

"I am afraid," she murmured.

The old gentleman paused outside the door and coughed as if to say: "I am coming, children."

The cab carried Nicholas toward the city through the freezing night. He was smoking a cigar, his eyes closed. He felt as if some dissonant pain had been left behind in the great house. And to himself he promised: "I'll resign her defense."

The cab slowly plodded its way. In front of the brewery there was a flood of light across the white road. Here his courage returned. He felt around and about him once more the stimulating life of the city.

"No, I won't," he argued. "Why should I? What business of mine is that? I'm a lawyer and that's all there is to it."

Reaching the house, he paid the driver, but stood hesitating on the walk. He was restless, felt that he could not sleep.

There was a café on the opposite side of the street. It was brilliantly lighted. He crossed over and stopped before the perspiring window-panes.

"I'd better go home after all," he said.

Then he answered himself:

"No, I must have a glass of cognac first."

And so he entered the smoky ill-smelling café.

CHAPTER VI

THE next morning Nicholas was wide awake the moment he opened his eyes. Usually he lay abed and day-dreamed for a little while, but this morning he had no inclination to idle, but sprang from drowsiness into life with a sudden fling. He felt that this day was the day of work and duty, and that he was expected to *act*. He dressed hurriedly and ran down-stairs to the street.

An uncouth figure was walking up and down before the house. It was Sebfi. Nicholas looked at him in surprise.

"What are you waiting here for at this time of day?"

"I was waiting for you."

"Why didn't you come up-stairs?"

"I didn't want to disturb you. I have been

walking about here for an hour and a half. I got up very early. But you see that makes little difference with me these days, for I can't sleep anyhow at night. I fall asleep on the tram-cars now and again when I get very tired. Yesterday, I fell asleep on one that circles the city and I must have gone around it half a dozen times before I awoke. But that doesn't matter. I want to have a talk with you."

Nicholas pointed to the café where the night before he had sat so long over his cognac.

"Let's go across there and have some breakfast."

They went and Sebfi, without taking off his broad-sleeved overcoat, settled down at the table and began to talk:

"You see, last night all sorts of plans and resolutions passed through my mind. I came to give you an account of them. Of course, the fundamental thing, the starting point, is that we have to save the girl. After a long and careful consid-

eration, I reached the decision—and it can't be altered by all the powers of heaven combined—that I will marry Riza either now or when she is released from prison, whenever that may be. So I suggest that instead of trying to dissuade me, instead of giving me advice as to how best to forget her, how to dismiss this love as a fleeting fancy or a stupid adventure—instead of this, I suggest you concentrate all your faculties on ways and means to free the girl and be of assistance to her. It would be quite useless to try to stop me, or to appeal to my common sense. I am at odds with common sense. What do you say, Counselor?"

Nicholas was dropping lumps of sugar into his cup and, as he didn't know what to answer, he continued the preparation of his morning coffee, giving himself up to it with all the particularity and pleasure of an epicure. But Sebfi was so self-absorbed he didn't know or care whether Nicholas replied, indeed he asked questions and

answered them himself as if he faced an imaginary interlocutor. In this way he could choose the replies that suited him best. At last he said:

"Do you know what inspired me to make this decision?" and waited.

"What?" Nicholas grunted.

"Logic, Counselor. I made a very strange discovery. Very strange, indeed."

"Well, what is it?"

"I shall tell you, but I must ask you to hold it in the strictest confidence. It must always remain a secret."

Nicholas nodded as if to assent to secrecy. Sebfi bent toward him.

"I am going to tell you, Counselor, but I must caution you that this information mustn't be divulged even if the case should come to trial; not under any circumstances, not even to save the girl from being sent to prison."

"What is it?" asked Nicholas.

Sebfi smiled happily.

"Counselor," he said very softly, almost in a whisper, "Riza is in love with me."

Nicholas put his spoon on the saucer very carefully and deliberately, and stared at Sebfi.

"What did you say?"

"Yes," said Sebfi.

"She is in love with you?"

"Indeed she is in love with me, Counselor."

He said this with such calm assurance in his voice and manner that Nicholas, very naturally, was amazed; especially after what had taken place at his last interview with the girl. But Sebfi went on:

"Yes, Counselor, she loves me. And that is what inspired me to the decision last night. Once more I have strength for the struggle. This knowledge has given me back my will to fight; has given me the new impetus to carry on."

If Sebfi had made this statement two or three days before, Nicholas would have accepted it at its face value and it would have been a matter of

perfect indifference to him. But now, he could not understand it; it seemed quite incomprehensible. For a moment he hesitated whether to take up the issue that lay between his own experience and the statement made by Sebfi, the flaw being so very obvious; but his curiosity got the better of him. For the first time in his life he was insincere with this poor ragged fellow and pretended that the affair, in its sentimental aspect, didn't interest him at all. He tried to assume a wholly professional tone when he asked:

"How do you know that, Mr. Sebfi?"

The answer came as quick as a shot.

"I know it from her."

The situation began to be interesting.

"From her?" Nicholas was amazed.

"Yes, from her."

But in spite of his confident tone, Sebfi showed a slight tremor of doubt, and looking searchingly at his companion, he asked.

"Did she tell you something else, perhaps?"

"She told me all sorts of things . . . but of course as matters are—in her position . . . but it is possible."

Then Sebfi disclosed his "logic," stammering yet speaking rapidly.

"You see, I don't know it directly from her, but—still I know it for certain—anyhow, I am perfectly convinced that I am right in my—supposition. This girl is not an ordinary, every-day kind of woman. She is so extraordinary, as a matter of fact, that it would be possible for her to keep her feelings secret, even unto death, from sheer pride."

By this time Nicholas suspected what it was all about. He saw that Sebfi was regarding him inquiringly, eager to be supported in his theory, indeed expecting Nicholas to back him up in that mad supposition which he irrelevantly called logic. Nicholas saw that it was the undying hope of the man in love, to whom there are no impossible combinations. Just what to answer, he did

not know. His smooth uneventful Philistine life had never before confronted him with such a puzzle.

Sebfi's air of confidence had given place to anxiety.

"Why are you silent?"

Embarrassed and with no answer ready Nicholas said:

"Oh, I'm not silent. I'm—just keeping quiet."

And to put an end to this awkward situation he called the waiter, paid his bill and rose to go. At the door he stopped.

"Which way are you going, Sebfi?"

"I don't know. But I do know that I must go somewhere, I must do something. This coming and going, however futile it may be, keeps the life in me. I feel that the minute I quit running about, the whole works will collapse. I'm like an electric motor; I could run on for ever; could kill the man who crossed my wires."

Sebfi glowered at Nicholas, then shrugging his

shoulders, he added: "But when the evening comes and the contact is broken, I would lie there like the motor, lifeless and cold."

"Any definite object in mind?" Nicholas asked.

"Well, if I should think hard enough I could even find something like that. I usually store up a few foolish ideas for the day's use. They make it worth while living for twenty-four hours."

"Look here, Sebfi, what is it you want to do?" The Counselor's patience was about exhausted.

"I want to go see Kore."

With a gesture Nicholas expressed everything that could possibly mean—"what's the use." But he said: "I wouldn't, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Because I have already been there, and in vain."

Sebfi smiled—the smile Napoleon Bonaparte would have worn had any one said to him: "Mr. Napoleon, why don't you 'check' your army; it's no use attempting to do anything with it."

"In vain?" he questioned. "There is no such thing as in vain."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have been to see him *once* in vain. Or that I may be going there now in vain. But I'll keep on going and going and going, until my legs wear off up to my knees. And at the end there will still remain something to do, and your one appearance there in vain, will not have been in vain after all. Do you follow me?"

The poor fellow became quite excited over his own intellectual expertness. He went on in this same mad strain, his cheeks burning, his hands working overtime. He almost fell into declamation, loud and dramatic, so that even the passers-by stopped to look and listen. The passer-by is the most inquisitive fellow on the face of the globe. He stops and stares at the least provocation. He is impossibly rude and unbearable. Sebfi said:

"What is there in a glass of water? Water, is it not? Pure water. Nothing else. The purest,

unadulterated, filtered water, the very absolute of nothingness; tasteless, colorless, odorless fluid. And when it wholly evaporates, there remains something still at the bottom of the glass; an almost invisible, quite immeasurable, tiny streak of yellowish shadow. And if I refill the glass a thousand times and allow the water to evaporate a thousand times, the tiny streak of yellowish shadow will form a sheet no thicker than a millionth part of an inch. And after I repeat this process a million times, one might taste the substance that remains at the bottom of the glass. Now, I am going to refill it a hundred million times. And if that will not bring results, I shall do it a thousand million times, until the glass is filled to the brim."

Well, this was Sebfi. These were his figures. Hundreds and thousands of millions. He used them with as little concern as others use twos and sixes. He was unsparing with his millions; not even his enemies could have accused him of miserliness.

He looked at Nicholas with pride in his eyes, as he came to the end of his simile. He felt that he had sung the aria of stubbornness, or as he would have put it: he "sang the hymn of the power of persistence. . . ."

It is a mistake to sing such songs to ordinary, commonplace people such as Nicholas happened to be. The man with common sense becomes incensed at such songs. He who looks on life as a placid, matter-of-fact journey, who travels around the barriers, seeking the smooth roads, he naturally loses his temper when others rant and brag about riding hindrances down, or hurdling them without regard to consequences. It's irritating to listen to such fellows when it is evident that their boasted valor and determination lie only in their imagination. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why there has always existed such an antipathy, such an unbridgeable gap between common-sense people and the dreaming Bohemians.

For a moment, Nicholas looked at Sebfi with contempt. Then, suddenly he began to feel sorry for the poor boy, as the realization of his own position again dawned upon him. He saw that he had no choice but to accept this dazed dreamer as a guide, lest he should have to reproach himself with negligence and indolence. Perhaps if the girl had not told him what she had, he would have said: "Run along, old chap, and leave me in peace; I have had enough of this affair." But it was too late to withdraw now. He had to go on with it.

And then, besides, there is something—God only knows what—at the bottom of every man's heart, a sort of gratitude toward the woman, any woman, who tells him that she loves him. You may call it vanity; but why call names, why quarrel over little things? No, no, it is not vanity. I am grateful to the woman who gazed tenderly into my eyes, even if I could not or would not reciprocate. She has given me something that she did not owe

me. Given me something I did not expect to get. Good soul, honest soul! What a lovely taste she has.

"Let us go," said Nicholas.

CHAPTER VII

ANY one passing the Kore confectionery shop that morning might have witnessed the following little episode:

The shop door opened and a well-dressed young man came out, leaving the door open behind him. He paused a moment, then turned and shouted back into the shop for some one. As the person called did not come out, he reentered the shop, soon to emerge again, this time dragging a shabbily dressed young fellow by the sleeve, who, flushed with excitement, shouting and gesticulating, poured a torrent of abuse upon some one within. Then he dug deep into his trousers pocket for a handful of small change which he hurled through the still open door, crashing it against the glass counter and scattering it over the piles of confectionery neatly towering on top. And

having exhausted his coppers and nickels—he had no larger money—he breathed a sigh of relief and said with bitter humor:

"At least I gave him a piece of my mind."

Once more quiet reigned in the little sunshiny street, as the two figures walked slowly toward Kerepesi Avenue.

Sebfi took Nicholas by the arm.

"Let me hold on, please, I'm getting dizzy. Whenever I lose my temper I seem to lose my strength with it."

He was pale and trembling. They had to stop for Sebfi to lean against the wall. Nevertheless he smiled. "Isn't that interesting, Counselor?"

The counselor shook his head sadly.

"Isn't it interesting?" repeated the actor. "It was a good thing I had no real money. If I had had a florin or a five-crown piece, I would certainly have broken some glass in old Kore's shop; and I'd have had to pay the damage."

Nicholas looked at him compassionately. "You can't get along this way, Sebfi," he said, shaking

his head. "That's not the way. If there had been any hope left of softening this old scoundrel's heart, you would have spoiled it with your rashness."

Sebfi raised his head and said sulkily: "I don't care."

"To be perfectly candid," Nicholas replied, "I do care."

"I don't," asserted the other. "I know my man. You people are too serious; you work by deductions, you put this and that together, you sift the facts; and you think that is the way to know humanity. I have a better way of acquiring that knowledge. Do you know how I do it? I've got eyes. Quick eyes. In a fraction of a moment I can see whether it is worth while to bother with a man or not. At his second sentence I knew Kore would never give in. And do you know why he'll never give in? Because he is in love."

And then he added with theatrical pathos: "Because he hates. . . ."

There is no more disconsolate object in the

world than an actor in actual trouble. If the difficulty is but a slight one, then it matters little, he will speak quite naturally. But God forbid that he encounter great crises; for then the poor fellow begins to recite. It would seem that a high pitch of excitement always drives the actor to demonstrate drama. On the stage he must achieve intensity in order to perform with all his heart. And the same degree of excitement off the stage produces the same result: he recites. Just as the talking doll at pressure on its back says: "Mamma, Mamma!" Were the house aflame, firemen rushing up and down the stairs and furniture being hurled into the courtyard, even then, if some one trying to escape stepped on the doll's back, it would cry out in exactly the same tone, "Mamma, Mamma!"

Thus Nicholas mused as he looked at his companion. The actor clenched his fist, bared his teeth and hissed: "I'm going to break old Kore into smithereens!"

Then his head drooped, his hand fell and he added in a quavering voice: "Though I am the greatest beggar of them all."

Nicholas interrupted him: "Come on, come on. You see the hundred million glasses of water, as an example, did not work. You upset the very first glass, old fellow. Come along!"

"Where?"

"To the prison. To Alkotmany Street."

With one last grand theatrical gesture, Sebfi lifted a deprecating palm as if to ward off some calamity. "No!" he said. "I am not going to her. I don't want to see her. I admire her silence and I respect the fact that she mutely loves me. She would be terribly ashamed."

So they decided that Nicholas should see Riza and Sebfi would wait for him outside the prison.

Arriving at the stairs that led into the prison basement, Nicholas stopped suddenly. He began to feel an uneasy sense of responsibility. No, no; he would withdraw from the case. He remem-

bered Lenke—her serious childlike gaze as he had related Riza's story. He knew, of course, there was nothing in it, but he recalled Sebfi's disaster of but a moment ago—the hundred million glasses of water. It is a thousand million nothings, but nevertheless at the bottom something always remains.

Man's fortunes are constantly being determined by the most trifling incidents. If the stairs to the warden's office had led upward, he might not have gone on. But going down, the gravity of his own body accomplished his descent. Meanwhile, as he was pondering, he had entered. . . .

In five minutes' time Riza was standing before him in the counselors' room. She offered her fine white hand to Nicholas. He felt how warm it was and how smoothly it slipped into his own. And the little adventuress who had gone through so many experiences spoke to him in a voice almost childishly sulky:

"One is either a fiancé or a lawyer. I wanted to send for you."

She looked at him with suffering but very serious eyes. Nicholas pulled himself together and said something to the effect that it was not necessary to remind him of his duty. And then the girl, as if she were the hostess in this great and gloomy house, motioned toward a chair. She, too, sat down and, lifting her face, said:

"I want to tell you something very important. Now, please, listen to me attentively and don't interrupt. You can speak when I am finished. Even then it will be unnecessary, because I am not going to ask you anything. I don't want anything from you; all I want is to tell you something."

She gazed deep into his eyes with the hostile look that women use when they are helplessly and hopelessly in love.

Nicholas lowered his head; he could not bear her gaze. He thought of Sebfi, who was waiting out in the street. The girl began to speak. She began as a child might who feels it has done some mischief; timidly, almost stammering.

"You do not know everything as yet . . . Counselor. I might say you do not know anything."

Nicholas glanced up at her and then turned his eyes away. He was tempted to say some word of encouragement but he said only: "Well—tell me all about it."

"I can't," she replied.

"Why not?"

"Because you are not looking at me."

He felt that sudden, hot sensation which is the usual signal to us that we are blushing. But he did not blush. He marshaled all the severity at his command and said:

"Don't talk to me like that. Such frivolity is out of place considering your grave position and the serious calling I am engaged in."

He would have gone on but Riza smiled in the middle of what would have been a lengthy sentence; smiled into the very heart of its frigidity.

Embarrassed, Nicholas paused. He felt that

in the preliminary battle that raged between them, the weapons being fine-edged smiles, glances, intonations, he had been beaten.

The girl was intensely feminine, otherwise she would not have sensed the approach of the exact moment when victory was at hand. At such crises a man is full of scruples and hesitations. A woman has a special sense that tells her: "This is your chance, this millionth part of a second, which you must not let slip, to which you must hang on for dear life."

And now, Riza pulled her chair nearer to his, and began to speak with passionate seriousness:

"You do not know anything. You are a lawyer and you were considering only the legal aspects of the case, instead of looking at me as one man would look at another when their paths cross. Of course, you regard me as a very common person, don't you?"

"No, not that . . ."

"Don't deny it. It's no use. I see it in every-

thing you say or do. I notice too that you are posing as the grave advocate; because you are afraid that I may say something that will stir up your soul. . . ."

Nicholas arose and said with great firmness:

"I shall not permit you . . ."

But the girl was quite certain now that she would get her hearing, if nothing else. So she laughed.

"You see," she said, "it is very easy to talk like that to a poor fallen creature who has invited you to a tea-party in the prison. Sit down and be ashamed of yourself."

This was said with such composure that in other surroundings it would have been branded as sheer insolence. But in this place, in this vast, tragic prison-house, in the dimly lighted basement room with the silhouette of a prison guard in the background, it must of necessity be either very ridiculous or very impressive. One has only to think of a doomed prisoner standing on the

threshold of the gallows, throwing insulting epithets at the judge, the district attorney, the social order. Would you call that insolence?

These thoughts flashed through Nicholas' mind and he felt a sudden warmth at his heart. So he resumed his seat and bowed his head at this tragic insolence.

"Yes. You consider me a very common creature," continued Riza, "although I am not. Today, before you leave here, you shall know what I am; you will see my soul as you now see my body. Before you leave here you will know everything. And why?"

Nicholas looked at her inquiringly.

"Because," said the girl, "I shall not let you go away until you do know and see. Do you understand? I shall not let you leave here before I have planted myself in your very soul, before I have embedded myself in your memory so that no one—no thing shall ever be able to get me out. Now listen to me. When I came up from the

country to the city, I came because I wanted to start life all over again. We need not worry about my having spoiled my life a number of times before. I know that quite well. Still, I am unwilling to accept the conditions people impose upon me. They demand of a girl, considering she has stolen once before, that she shall take the world seriously; she must retire and refrain from any social life; must accept the contempt of every one without a murmur and take her banishment as a matter of course. Why should she? Should I begin to take you honest moralists seriously, your pettiness and your meanness, just at the time when I am gambling for my life? Why should I—may I ask? These people are quite willing to let me kick over the traces of bourgeois morality once; but when I become, so to say, lost in their eyes, they refuse, if I repeat the offense against their morals, to allow me to behave as a foe is supposed to behave. They all confess that they are my enemies but they will not permit me to be theirs. Isn't that so?"

Her cheeks were burning. It was evident that she had been doing some little thinking in her cell and had built up a special philosophy for herself and for her vindication.

Nicholas answered coolly:

"What is it you want? What are you driving at?"

The girl in turn became embarrassed, and answered:

"I don't know what I want. I had it on my mind and I had to rid myself of it. But I am talking mainly that I may work myself up to something."

She threw a dark glance at Nicholas. Outside, in the free world, no one would have attached any importance to this glance. It would have been smiled at as theatrical or at most, mildly sinister. But in this place, that bored figure in blue uniform standing at the door gave a somber aspect to everything.

"I beg of you, for goodness' sake," she said, "let me be candid with you. Will you?"

"Of course, but . . ."

"I know. But I should not speak of 'that.' "

"You have guessed it exactly."

"But everything revolves around that. If we didn't speak of it, all we say here would be tainted with falsehood. Everything I have done or that I am going to do resolves into the one thing—that I love you."

And she repeated it almost loud enough for the prison guard to overhear—

"Because, I love you."

They were silent for a moment. Nicholas stared straight ahead of him intently. The girl had touched the very depths of his soul.

"You said," he repeated, "that everything resolves into this?"

"Yes, that I love you."

"Everything you are doing and are going to do. And you said something else, too. You said 'what I have done.' What did you mean by that?"

She repeated it defiantly:

"What I have done."

"How is that? What you have done . . . the thing you are here for?"

"Yes."

"The thing you are here for . . . you did that . . . because . . ."

"Why do you hesitate? Why beat about the bush? I did it because of my love for you."

"Because . . . because . . ."

"Again you are afraid to say it. I stole! I stole! That's what they call it! I stole because of my love for you."

Nicholas smiled. Smiled, not with pleasure but from relief, as one slowly coming out of an evil dream, pauses for a moment on the borderland of consciousness with the comforting assurance that: "This is but a dream. How foolish to have been afraid." Nicholas smiled because he thought: "These are but lies. Why should I worry?"

Riza read his smile of self-satisfaction.

"And you are smiling at what I have just said."

"Naturally," Nicholas replied.

"Do you think all this is to fool you, to trap you?"

The young lawyer hesitated.

"Don't be afraid—" she urged, "say so if that's what you think. You'll not offend me. Even if you say you believe I am lying to you, I'll not be insulted. In my position I *can't* be insulted. Do you think I am telling you lies? Say it."

"I most certainly do."

Riza's face lost all trace of excitement. She was perfectly calm as she said:

"It is fine of you to come straight out with it. At least there will be no misunderstanding between us. It's a clear case, and I am going to prove it to you, so long as you don't believe it."

"That will be most interesting." Nicholas felt he had himself so well in hand that he could afford a bit of sarcasm.

"Do you know Miss Bella?"

"The chorus girl?"

"Yes, the one who used to come to the *patisserie*."

"Oh, I know her slightly."

"And you know, perhaps, that there was a sort of friendship between us?" Riza was the lawyer now, conducting a cross-examination.

"I have seen you talking with her."

"And you also know that the detectives did not find the money I stole?"

"I know. But where does all this get us?"

Riza paid no heed to his question, but plunged straight ahead.

"And you have heard that I bought an expensive, a very expensive dress with the money, in Vienna Street?"

"Yes, I have heard of it."

"Have you also heard that I gave part of the money to Miss Bella?" The girl's eyes never left the young man's face.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I am going to tell you first of all why I bought that dress. Does it interest you?"

"Everything that has any bearing on the case interests me, professionally."

"I bought it because I wanted to look pretty, so that you'd notice me. I couldn't attract your attention in the shop; you wouldn't look at me. You wouldn't even look up when I took your order, like the rest of them, although I had been fostering all the warmth of my soul for the glances I was saving for you, whenever our eyes should happen to meet. I was trying to pour all this warmth into your heart . . ."

"Please . . ."

"Please let me tell it. I was suffering, tossing sleeplessly about at night; and in the mornings, when the shop was empty and I was alone with Mr. Kore, I had to listen to his proposals and his stupid and vain assurances that I could become his wife whenever I said the word."

Nicholas smiled again.

"I knew that," he said softly.

"Did you guess it?"

"I deduced it—since—"

"There, you see! I could hardly wait for tea time when you were to come. And you came and never looked at me. And I went on suffering. Every day I was digging myself, deeper and deeper, into this unfortunate infatuation. But why should I go on? You probably still think I'm telling you lies. Neither the color in my cheeks nor the quaver in my voice is evidence for you. You are a lawyer even now. You want facts and documents. Don't worry, Counselor, I have those, also. I have kept a diary, and night after night, entered all my thoughts and feelings in my little book. The history of the dress is also on record there. One day I said to myself: 'I can't go on any longer.' I felt as if the earth were slipping from under my feet; that I was not the kind of woman who could conquer with the or-

dinary weapons other women use. How could I ruffle your bourgeois soul? I had a foolish idea. I went to the city and I saw a dress in a show window. I lost my senses. It flashed through my mind to buy this dress, to have my hair waved and perfumed; and one evening when you came to the shop I would stand in the center of the floor and with burning cheeks and flaming eyes I would go up to you and take your head between my hands and kiss your lips and not let you go until you knew that I loved you, adored you and would willingly die for you. . . ."

("No," Nicholas said to himself. "It's too fanciful for a lie.")

The girl drew a deep breath and then hurried on, her voice husky, her eyes shining.

"I rushed back to the pastry shop and stole the money that same evening. Next day I bought the dress. But I could never wear it; they caught me before I even had time to try it on. I only mentioned Miss Bella, because she knows all this.

All that happened before I was arrested, is told in my diary; Miss Bella has it. If you care to, you can go to her and read the entries."

She stopped. Nicholas felt as if some one were clutching his throat. He could find nothing to say, his arguments, his composure, his self-confidence were gone. At last he managed to stammer:

"Please . . . Miss Riza . . . for Heaven's sake . . . I'm engaged to a girl . . . and I shall tell her all this word for word. . . ."

With an air of triumph, the girl stood up and faced him.

"That would only be telling her an old story."

Nicholas looked at her in amazement.

"Telling her an old story? What do you mean?"

"I mean that all I have just told you, I have already told her, in a letter."

"When?"

"Yesterday. Miss Bella was about to leave me

and I slipped the letter into her hand. This very moment your fiancée is reading it. . . ."

Nicholas jumped from his chair. He stared at her with wide open eyes. "It is not true," he shouted. "It is a lie."

Riza gazed at him mute and motionless. But in her silence he could read the unhappy, the tragic truth.

"It is not true," he insisted. "It is no use to keep silent; I know it is not true."

He paused for some word from her. But she only gazed at him; bitter smiles playing about the corners of her mouth, as if she were saying to herself: "It's evident that you do not know me yet." Then she turned and sat down. And he repeated for the third time: "It is not true."

Then suddenly aware that the prison guard was watching him, he sat down in the little armchair, pulled it directly in front of the girl and spoke rapidly, almost babbling, as if he wanted to put a quick end to this terrible affair.

"This is just as much of a lie as the story you invented about the dress," he said. "I know it is a falsehood. You want to frighten me, because you think I am not doing my work conscientiously, and so you invented this stuff, and you even have the bad taste to mix my fiancée in it. You ought to be ashamed of yourself . . . not because you are tactless, but because you are clumsy. . . . Now . . . tell me, please, that you have only been joking."

"I can not tell you that for I have not been joking."

"You are stubborn, too."

"I am not. And I have not told you any lies."

"Do you mean that you actually wrote to my fiancée?"

"I most surely did."

This was said with so much earnestness that it had to be believed. Nicholas was gasping for breath. Then, as he pulled himself together, a last hope presented itself:

"But you have not sent it to her."

"I have."

"Where did you send it?"

"To the old city prison—away out to the old prison, where her father is warden. Miss Bella went in a fiacre, unless she misappropriated the five guldens I gave her for that purpose."

Nicholas jumped up and reached for his hat and cane. The girl quietly stepped up to him and barred his way:

"Please don't go, Counselor."

"Of course I'm going." He was pale and excited.

"Don't go away, my dear Counselor," Riza repeated, smiling. "I advise you not to go just now. I have a very good reason."

The girl was again speaking in tones that compelled his attention. Nicholas turned and looked at her in amazement.

"And why shouldn't I go?"

"Because as soon as you start, this well be-

haved prisoner now standing before you will embrace you, will wrestle with you, and scream and shriek so that the whole place will be in an uproar. She will use her last bit of physical strength to restrain you, even though your clothes are torn into rags before she is through: and in the end the guard will have to rescue the Counselor from his client."

The last words were spoken loudly and in a voice that promised tears to follow. Nicholas was frightened and awed. From the adjoining office a clerk looked in through the half open door. The guard, too, made a move at the other entrance.

"For heaven's sake," said the lawyer, "speak softly."

Riza looked back and saw the inquisitive face of the clerk. The guard advanced a step into the room. She returned to her chair and covered her face with her hands. A long silence followed.

Nicholas stood, perplexed, before her. He be-

gan to see that it was not a sequence of accidents that had landed him in this odd, this cruel situation. He realized that if he regarded the case with less honesty he might say to himself: "How the devil did I get into this strange situation?" But he looked things squarely in the face and he possessed certain rare qualities,—the lack of which often causes misery and sorrow in our poor failing hearts,—he possessed a clear and sober vision,—found only in those who have lived a cold and unimaginative youth, who have never besieged high Heaven and never been professionally engaged in building castles in the air. He realized that he, too, was to blame, to a certain extent, for his position here in the prison office, in front of a weeping girl who was in love with him—and he had no choice but to believe that she was. He thought of Lenke, the little white room, her father, the quiet old gentleman who could quit the room with so much cleverness whenever he wanted to leave the young couple alone. . . .

He looked at the girl before him and saw that she was silently weeping. It was quite evident that she was right when she spoke of her last bit of strength. A moment ago she was all fight and fire and passion,—as if she had been some exalted being; the prison disappeared, the symbols of restraint vanished, the guard became the misty figure of a lackey standing at attention, awaiting her orders, and the office seemed to be her salon in her palace, crowded with people, and all her own.

And now there she was, sitting with her face buried in her hands, broken and weeping. She was just a poor miserable girl, whose defiance had been shattered. The guard again became a prison guard, the walls of the room seemed to grow tall and the bars of the windows to be silhouetted more impressively than ever against the clear sky.

Nicholas was actually frightened for himself. He felt that this girl now had a stronger hold on him than when she had threatened force a mo-

ment ago. He wondered whether Riza realized this. He was saying to himself: "If she does realize it, then that is why she is crying." He felt a strong need of speech. He was making designs—invisible ones—with his cane on the shabby carpet under the table. Very gently he said:

"Well. . . ."

He expected an answer to this but the girl did not offer any. Her mouth twitched and her shoulders rose and fell, she wept on. Then Nicholas spoke again.

"See here, please . . ."

Real drama has very simple language. The most pitiful and tragic scenes of our life are usually punctuated by "wells" and "see heres."

"Never mind," she said suddenly, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand as if to dismiss in this movement her tears and all the causes for them. It was a defiant gesture suggesting that she was not only ashamed of being so weak but that she felt a contempt for this weakness. Slowly a smile spread over her face.

Nicholas spoke to her softly:

"Now tell me, please, what it is you want?"

"Nothing."

"I don't mean to offend you—I see you are unhappy, but I think you don't know yourself what you want."

The girl looked up at him and said:

"You may be right."

She gazed at him a little longer and then, in a whisper:

"Now if you want to go, you may." And added: "I imagined things quite otherwise, but my strength failed me before I could accomplish what I set out to do. I have lost this battle. Now go away and do whatever you like . . . go to your fiancée . . . I am defeated, am like one left on the battle-field wounded. . . ."

Nicholas consoled her:

"Now, now—don't be depressed."

But the words sounded stupid, so he adopted the lawyer's pose:

"Please collect yourself and think about your

situation. I shall do everything in my power to help you to get out and to start afresh."

The girl rose.

"Please go away now. I beg you to leave me. I must be alone and have time to think. And you needn't worry about me. I shall have a good sleep and to-morrow morning I will again be strong and courageous. I know I mustn't give way, or I am lost. But . . ."

She stopped suddenly. He waited but she did not go on. So he asked:

"But?"

"I would like to ask you a favor."

"What is it?"

"I know it is a very childish thing, but please don't refuse. . . ."

"Well? What would you like?"

"I am sure it is ridiculous, but it would do me no end of good."

She cast her eyes down like the dear young innocents in plays and novels. The pose did not at

all suit her, but perhaps that is why it seemed sincere to this self-conscious girl. She said softly:

"Shake hands with me . . . and . . . and . . . . and . . ."

Nicholas was frightened. But he slowly held out his hand toward the girl. Her hand was hot and it trembled slightly as she placed it in his. Pity for the poor creature welled up in his heart. Clumsily, still holding her hand, he drew her toward him and slowly swept her hair back from her brow. For a moment he let his hand rest upon her soft black hair. . . .

The door leading to the corridor was quietly opened. It was opened by an armed guard but another man put his head through the opening.

It was Sebfi, the impatient Sebfi.

Riza was the first to see him, as she stood facing the door. She smiled. It was a triumphant smile. Nicholas turned just as Sebfi, staring at them, slowly withdrew his head, and the door closed.

"What was that?" asked Nicholas, surprised.

The girl was still smiling: "It was Sebfi," she said.

"And . . ."

"And he saw you holding my hand and caressing me. He not only saw it, but he took it in, fully. And he not only looked, but he—could not bear to look."

"And you seem to enjoy it."

"Yes, I do—very much."

"And why?"

"Because I do. I don't know the reason but it gave me very great pleasure. . . . Perhaps there will be some one now, who will persuade you to look after me. . . . That man will question you, he will quiz you, he will cross-examine you. . . ."

She was really happy over it; was quite merry again.

"This is a lucky day for me after all," she said brightly. "Now go, Counselor."

Nicholas started toward the door. It gave

him an uneasy feeling to know that Sebfi was waiting for him outside.

"Go on, Counselor," she urged, "don't be afraid."

He turned back.

"I'm not afraid," he said, almost harshly. And he went. He even forgot to say good-by to her.

CHAPTER VIII

Not finding Sebfi in the basement corridor, Nicholas hurried up-stairs, two steps at a time, and rushed from one end of the ground floor concourse to the other. At the doorway he collided with several young lawyers who shouted at him: "Where are you running?"

But he did not answer them. When he reached the street, he breathed deep and freely. It was a beautiful, sunny day. A snow melting day. Down-stairs in the basement the winter's chilly dampness still ruled supreme. But up here there was a tenderly caressing breeze that promised the coming of spring, from somewhere behind the hills of Buda; bringing the faint perfume of distant violets and the fresh scent of young grass.

Sebfi was nowhere to be seen. He had run away, Nicholas was convinced; but no matter, he

would have the pleasure of seeing him later in the day.

He walked toward the cab station, for he must see Lenke now, and he must hurry about it, too.

But he stopped when he reached the other side of the street, for there leaning against the wall of a house—as if it had been built for his particular accommodation—was Sebfi, pale, miserable, the vision of despair itself. Not a day passed that something did not happen to poor Sebfi that made it necessary for him to lean against a wall, something for which it was worth while to lean against a wall.

Nicholas walked to where the young actor had draped himself.

"Did I keep you waiting long?"

He did not answer. It was beneath his dignity to answer.

"I shall have to leave you now, my dear Sebfi," Nicholas went on, "as I am in a great rush; I have to see my fiancée at the old city prison."

He purposely emphasized the words, my fiancée, for he was genuinely sorry for poor Sebfi. He wanted that sentence to mean to him: "Don't be afraid, you stupid boy, I am engaged already and I couldn't take your girl from you even if I wanted to."

At Sebfi's continued silence, Nicholas became impatient.

"What are you standing here for? Why don't you say something?"

Not a word from Sebfi.

"What's the matter with you? Are you dumb?"

Realizing that Sebfi's stubborn silence was an intentional affront, Nicholas shrugged his shoulders: "If you have nothing to say . . . I am off. . . ."

Then he added rather more harshly than he intended: "You act as if you were crazy."

At this Sebfi laughed the kind of laugh playwrights indicate in their plays with the words:

". . . (Laughs sarcastically, bitterly. . .)"

"Ha, ha!" sneered Sebfi, "ha, ha! I am crazy, am I? Ha, ha, ha!"

Nicholas was distinctly annoyed.

"I'm telling you, I'm in a hurry. But you may come to my rooms at three this afternoon and we can talk things over then."

"So, you are running away from me?"

"The devil, I am running away! I tell you I'll see you this afternoon. Isn't that clear enough?"

Sebfi raised a solitary finger.

"But now, this moment, you are running away from me. You can't deny that."

"This moment? Running away from you?"

Nicholas had to laugh. It was so funny.

"You're a crazy fellow, my friend," he said. "If you were not, I would walk off and leave you standing here. What is it you want?"

"Are you going to see your fiancée?"

"Yes, I am."

"In a cab?"

"Yes."

"Well, take me along. We can have a talk on the way."

Nicholas hesitated for a second, but then he thought he couldn't very well refuse.

"All right, I don't mind. Come along."

Sebfi was silent for a long time gazing blankly in front of him, now and then nodding sadly, evidently working out a problem in his mind that must have been difficult of solution. At last Nicholas had to begin the conversation.

"Well, what's on your mind? Come, out with it."

"You know," said Sebfi, "when we started out toward the prison I trusted you as if you were my own brother. And now . . . now I don't know what to think of you. . . ."

"Why?"

"You saw me when I looked into the lawyers' room?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"And still you ask me, 'what of it?' "

It passed through Nicholas' mind that perhaps it would be wiser not to give him an answer at all; to ignore his remark. He somehow felt that this man had no right to question him, to embarrass him, to place him in an unpleasant position and to annoy him with his cross questions. But this inclination to the easiest way was quickly suppressed by a well-brought-up conscience. If one flatters conscience year after year by always listening to its promptings, conscience becomes spoiled and one becomes its slave. Such slaves are usually described by their fellows as honest men. But Nicholas felt a certain rebellion in his heart; he wanted to revolt against that something which was presuming to master him, to dictate to him.

"You even dare to ask me?" said Sebfi with a shade of impatience in his voice.

"I dare to ask, Mr. Sebfi; I certainly dare to ask."

"I am surprised."

"And why, why should you be surprised?"

"Because there are fleeting moments, when a man may see something . . . something . . . that . . ."

Poor Sebfi essayed a smile. He wanted it to register sarcasm, but it didn't come off. What he achieved was more nearly a mixture of torture and fear than anything else.

"That what—that what?"

"That explains a good many things," Sebfi continued. "Something that X-rays a man whom heretofore we have known only superficially."

He began to laugh, this time really sarcastically and he felt an inward satisfaction at having succeeded, for it is always foremost in the mind of an actor whether or not his face and intonation express the thing he intended them to express.

"You see, Counselor, once I had a part in a French comedy . . . true, it was only a minor part, the valet . . . in which there was a drunken

man. This drunken man comes home late at night carrying a small torch-light in his hand. But he held the light in the wrong direction and he swore terribly because he couldn't see, although his torch was burning. Of course he couldn't see, so long as he was throwing the light on his stomach instead of on his path. You see, Counselor, my feeling now is that you must have been tipsy or something, and were holding your torch the wrong way, toward yourself. And, as we ragged comedians used to say on such occasions, I can see into your belly, my dear sir. . . ."

Sebfi spoke bitterly, defiantly. The sudden realization that Nicholas might be interested in Riza not only as a client, but also as a woman, was nothing less than torture to him.

The lawyer began to upbraid him:

"You are not only ungrateful, but you are rude, also." Nicholas was glad of an excuse to be angry with the young man. But his gladness did not last long, for Sebfi hurried to make

amends. He looked at Nicholas almost tenderly and then with a sentimental tremor in his voice, he said:

"Did I offend you?"

The other man shrugged his shoulders.

"Did I offend you?" Sebfi insisted.

"No."

"Yes, I did. I know I offended you. I was stupid. Please forgive me. . . . But am I to blame that I love that girl so terribly, so inexpressibly? Am I to blame for that? Can I help it?"

And his tears began to flow. With Sebfi, crying was just as commonplace as coughing or sneezing with other mortals. But tears are not always tears, and the beholder never knows what they are worth, if anything, or which tears are meaningful and which are not; whether they flow lightly from just beneath the surface or come up from the depths, out of pain and suffering. A crying man is the most pitiful object in the world

and he who can cry with ease is lucky. Tears have the value of gold on the scales of the human heart; and the weights do not ask whether it is found or stolen gold, or whether you had to sweat in the digging. Its face value never changes whatever its origin.

This tearful performance of Sebfi's reached into the very heart of Nicholas.

"Well . . . well," he said, much embarrassed, "don't cry. It is a terrible thing when a grown man cries."

This was just what Sebfi needed. His tears now began to flow in veritable showers, and he cried with as much gusto as he did other unusual things. Mind you, he did not pretend; it was not merely acting; he cried with his very soul, just as he spoke or just as he played when the curtain was up and the audience waiting to applaud. But he could command his tears to cease just as easily as he could command them to flow. Shadow or sunshine were always at his disposal.

"Didn't I tell you," he said, half smiling, "what a stupid fool I am? If you have never believed it before, at least now I have proved it to you."

"What were you thinking of?"

"Should I tell you? You see, I am a bit ashamed of it."

"Go on, don't be silly."

"You are right. It's much better that we thrash it out, and clear the atmosphere. I thought—that you were interested in the girl. And more than that; I imagined that Riza was in love with you. . . ."

He again looked at Nicholas with gloomy eyes. Evidently his suspicions had not yet been allayed.

Nicholas waved his hand.

"Don't be foolish. . . ."

By this time they had reached the wooded alley leading to the big yellow house, the silent, fearful palace of the mute. It looked even gloomier than usual.

Nicholas pointed toward it and said:

"Don't you know that I have a . . ."

"I know, I know. . . ."

"Well, then, what do you want?"

"Nothing," was his answer, but his manner seemed to say, "Still, I know what I know."

As they drove up to the gate of the big yellow house, Nicholas saw that another cab was at the entrance and he recalled what Riza had told him a short while ago, of Bella and the letter she was to deliver. But the cab was a cheap one-horse affair, not the kind Riza had told Bella to employ. Yes, but wasn't Bella too shrewd to spend all the five guldens on cab fare, wouldn't she save some of the money for herself? All this passed through Nicholas' mind while the cab door was being opened, but his speculations ended abruptly for at that moment Bella appeared behind the barred entrance, accompanied by the rustle of silk skirts, and the obsequious Szabo, who opened the gate for her. But when she caught sight of

Nicholas, her grand manner suddenly left her and she became nervous and ill at ease, the little suburban flapper that she really was.

"You . . . you here?" she said in great agitation.

Sebfi was still in the cab and was perhaps even more frightened than Bella herself, if that were possible. Between the two stood Nicholas, calm outwardly but trembling within, for he knew that Riza's letter had been delivered.

"You here?" exclaimed Bella again, who must have remembered the query from one of the plays in which she sang in the chorus. An actor consciously or unconsciously always quotes from one play or another. He can't help it, it's in his blood to speak what others have written.

"Yes," said Nicholas, "as you see."

"I brought a message," she stammered.

"Did you deliver it?" Nicholas showed his nervousness plainly.

"Yes, I did."

"Well, then . . . well, then. . . . It was a piece of great impudence on your part."

This insult delighted Bella. It made her feel perfectly at home, and she would not at that moment have exchanged it for a gold ring. Now that she was insulted, she could lift her head and deliver a glance of withering contempt. She could even say something like this: "Such insulting remarks, sir, are far beneath my notice."

And she could with dignity step into the cab and call to the driver: "To the People's Theater."

And this was what actually happened. Thus one of the ancient arks rumbled away but there was still one left, the more pitiable of the two.

Nicholas turned around. He wanted to say something to Sebfi who was still in the cab. He did not know exactly what, so he left it to impulse to supply something appropriate for the occasion. But Sebfi came to the rescue of impulse and saved the situation.

"Don't say anything, please," he said rather tenderly. "It's no use trying . . . why torture yourself?"

"But . . ."

"Let's drop it, Counselor."

Then he called to the driver:

"Follow the other cab to the People's Theater."

And to his friend:

"Never mind. . . . Let me close the door, please."

Nicholas stood at the gate for a time looking after Sebfi's cab, and beyond it to the other one which was nearing the corner. He noticed that Sebfi leaned out of the window as if speaking to the driver and that immediately the whip was applied and the first cab overtaken just as it reached the highway at the turning. He saw Sebfi jump out, speak, with a grand gesture, to Bella, who gracefully alighted from her cab, paid her driver and joined Sebfi in his ancient vehicle. Then the old ark began to move again in the

golden sunshine, splashing the melting snow along the deserted highroad, carefully evading the deeper puddles, on its journey to the city.

"How do you do, Counselor," said Szabo the gate keeper, standing in military pose.

There was still some little hope left to Nicholas. Perhaps Lenke had not been in, and so could not have received the letter. He seized on this margin of hope and eagerly asked the gate keeper:

"Is Miss Lenke in?"

"Yes, she is in," said Szabo with a broad smile, thinking he had, with his information, given cause for great joy.

But Nicholas Chathy only lowered his head and asked: "And . . . was that woman with her any length of time?"

"It must have been, well—about twenty minutes."

She had not only delivered the letter but she had talked to her. . . .

He gave up hope and started toward the warden's quarters with firm and deliberate steps, taking no notice of Szabo, who looked after him with a doubtful shake of the head.

There was nothing else to do but to face the music. There was no such thing as retreating. At the inner door he collided with Mrs. Vogel, superintendent of the women's section. He did not stop to apologize but rushed up the stairs, three steps at a time, and almost broke through the door of the warden's office.

Maria, the severe, was on the other side of that door. He did not even greet her as he asked, breathing hard and fast:

"Lenke . . . where is she?"

("He does not even greet me," thought Maria. "Of course, he would not take the trouble to say, how do you do, to the poor oppressed relation.")

She refused to answer him; simply shrugged her shoulders and motioned toward the girl's room with a contemptuous jerk of her head that meant everything but admitted nothing.

A moment later Nicholas stood in the little white room. There at the table, under the portrait of Frederick Schiller, sat a young girl, her face buried in her hands and in her lap a letter crowded with fine lines, closely written.

CHAPTER IX

NICHOLAS stood before her for a long time without uttering a word. Within the last few hours, he had gone through so many embarrassing moments, had had so many problems to solve, as well as having had to extricate himself from so many impossible situations and find his way out of such a number of mazes that at the supreme moment of all he did not know where to begin. He could never have believed that he would stand in this little white room with the emotions that were at this moment harassing his very soul. All sorts of events became mixed up in his mind, events that came so unexpectedly and—he felt—into which he had drifted quite unwittingly. He saw nothing clearly; the whole thing was blurred. All he was conscious of was that here he stood before the girl who had nothing to do with the

affair up to now, who had only watched it from a detached point of view, as a legal case in which her fiancé was interested, but who had now suddenly become the heroine of a romantic situation.

Lenke did not notice his entrance and only sensed his presence after he had stood there for several minutes. A short pause followed the long one. Then Lenke raised her head and looked at Nicholas Chathy. Apparently she expected him to say something, but as he could not find his tongue, she said, in little more than a whisper:

"It would be best if you went home now and left me to myself."

At this he was ready to speak. But she stopped him before the words came.

"Don't say anything please," she said, "for you have no cause to excuse yourself. You stand clear and honest before me in this affair as far as I can credit the letter and the few words I had with the girl who was just here. But I should like to be left alone, please. . . ."

"Why?" was all that Nicholas got past his dry lips.

"I'd like to collect my thoughts . . . for I know nothing now. . . . I don't know what to do, what to say . . . what to think. . . . This letter, here, excited me terribly. . . ."

She pointed at the letter lying before her. It was a closely written four-page letter, very tiny script on large sheets. There was even a line or two on the margins, written crosswise, and it was quite evident that the writer had much to say and that she was a voluble and determined person.

"Look here, Lenke," said Nicholas, who had regained, at last, something of his composure. "I have no idea what that letter contains. The thing has come quite unexpectedly as far as I am concerned. . . . I . . . I have fallen into this affair, got mixed up in it . . . believe me, my dear Lenke . . . it is a catastrophe!"

The girl seemed to understand what he wanted. She picked up the letter and handed it to him.

"Read it," she said.

"May I?"

"Yes. Just to show you that I do believe you when you say you do not know its contents. If I didn't trust you, we two couldn't be here talking now. . . . Read it."

He reached out eagerly for the letter and read it. This was what he read:

"Dear Miss Rimmer:

"I am writing to you as a stranger for I have never seen you and I have only known of your existence for a few weeks. This being the case you will have to summon all the kindness and generosity that are in you in order to be able to excuse this letter, and I shall have to summon all my courage to complete it, for it needs courage, I assure you. But now that I am writing it I also feel that it is not ordinary courage that directs my pen, but the desperation that springs from despair. It is more than courage that guides my pen. You will no doubt read this letter in a

pleasant, comfortable room; I am writing it behind bars and an iron door, secretly and in haste, so that the guards shall not find out about it. For I am locked up here in prison, having stolen money from an old man who entrusted that money to me.

"Perhaps you have heard my name mentioned. I am that Riza Nagy your fiancé must have mentioned, as he is my lawyer and I suppose would tell you something of me. You need not worry about the facts, whether I am innocent of the crime or not, whether they are going to sentence me to imprisonment or not, for to this I am wholly indifferent. I am not interested at all. There is quite a different angle to this case about which I would like to talk to you now on this piece of paper.

"Miss Rimmer, I stole the money in a mad moment because I was in love with your fiancé. I knew that neither the money nor the things I was going to buy with it, would help me to gain the

love of the man I adore; I knew it was a mad idea of a mad moment, so I am not saying this to excuse myself, or, particularly, to throw the blame for my deed upon your fiancé, or blame him for my misfortune, but just to let you see, to make you believe how much I love that man. For I had only one idea, more of a joke than anything else; I wanted to dress like a queen, to make him take notice of me, to impress him with this crazy idea, and you see, Miss Rimmer, this little joke, which was to lead to nowhere, was enough to make me commit a crime, to become a branded woman all my life. Now you can imagine, Miss Rimmer, what I would be capable of for that man if the issues involved were to center around his love for me, or if I were to fight for his love, or if I could make him love me through any act of mine.

"You will perhaps think me mad, but that does not affect me in the least. I don't care. As a matter of fact I am quite willing to acknowledge that I have become mad due to this infatuation.

I know, I feel that I am drifting into this love irresistibly and I shall either find salvation or death and damnation in it. I have already reached the prison because of it, but that is the least, the most unimportant feature of it. I do not worry about my freedom, simply because, if I had it, I could do nothing with it that would bring me nearer to him. It does not worry me that I am a prisoner, soon to be a convict, that a ruined life stares me in the face; my only concern is that perhaps I have sunk in his estimation as well, though I don't believe that. As far as I am concerned, I could adore the shadow of the man who would commit a crime such as I have committed for the love of me, and who was willing to go to prison because of that love.

"Now that I am here and in this situation, the longing for him has grown a thousand fold and my love for him is the only thing that makes me long for freedom, long to purify myself in the very glory of my love for him. These four dirty

walls have taught me to pray for the three things that are the most sacred in the eyes of respectable people: love, freedom and purity. I am in love and nobody loves me. I want to be free and I am a prisoner. I am longing for purity, and Miss Rimmer, I am not pure.

"Slowly I am getting to what I really wanted to tell you. You see, my three longings, the realization of them all depends on one man, your fiancé; that is, all my longings center in him. He is the only man in the world who could return this piece of wreckage, this floating derelict to life. Now I am full of bitterness and defiance, and there is desperation in my heart when I think of it. Why should I have to go to ruin, why should I be wrecked in this garbage can of all the world, when I am a living loving creature, who never hurt anybody and who has given more pleasure than pain in my sinful life, and when for the first time in that life, I am in love?

"I don't care, Miss Rimmer, what I say in this

letter or how I say it: for I don't care for you, for your social position, for your love, for anything. This is war, and I am going to fight to the last ditch, without pity, without quarter and with every desperate force I can command. I am glad that every minute of my life is crowded; that every thought, every breath I draw has its purpose, has its goal.

"And it is not a contemptible goal either; I want to save my own life.

"What does Nicholas Chathy mean to you? I have never seen you, but I can picture how you look. Fair or brunette—an insignificant girl who must have been brought up by her father and mother in a calm and ordered life, to get married when the time comes and never to cause any stir in the world. You are permitting yourself to be led along by your father wherever he wants to lead you. Consequently Nicholas Chathy is yours in the most practical, commonplace, unemotional way.

"But to me, Miss Rimmer, in my eyes, this man is something quite different. To me, he represents life itself, throbbing and vivid life, from which at present I am exiled. If I were just an ordinary criminal with no aim other than that Chathy should rescue me from my prison, you would be right in smiling at this letter and saying: 'This girl tries to appear very sincere but her lies are too naive, too transparent.'

"But that is not the case. This prison cell of mine is only a station on my way to the battle-ground, where I will fight for the man I love. Unknowingly and unsuspectingly, you, too, are approaching that battle-field and one day we shall meet there.

"I write you this letter in order to warn you of this struggle. I haven't anything to lose; even if this letter should be the cause of a family tragedy, I should not care. It might, indeed, help my cause, some great upheaval like that, for out of the heart of it, I would tear Chathy free for my-

self. In turmoil and in trouble, I would win because trouble is my natural element, it's where I am at home. My strength, Miss Rimmer, is the strength of the oppressed; my courage is the courage of desperation.

"Perhaps I am writing foolish things, and perhaps the advice I am about to offer you is just as foolish, but it certainly is sincere. I am not sure whether you will regard it as impertinence or something even worse, but I would advise you to give up Nicholas Chathy, because he shall never be yours. I am going to take him away from you. If you give him up, voluntarily, all well and good. But if you refuse, you will certainly be defeated in the end and perhaps you will receive wounds from which you may never get over the rest of your life.

"I feel this is the first and last conversation we shall ever have, Miss Rimmer. True, I am the only speaker, for you will not give me an answer. I am not expecting one. I hope you will not re-

ply. Perhaps, just as we have never seen each other in the past, we shall never meet in the future and perhaps we shall, who knows?

"God be with you, Miss Rimmer.

"Riza Nagy."

Nicholas laid the letter on the table. Lenke stood at the window with her back toward him.

Softly the young man said:

"This is terrible, but it is ridiculous too; the madness of a vain silly girl—"

Lenke turned around. They gazed at each other for what seemed a long time. Further speech did not seem possible and yet there was so much to say.

Then, fortunately, the door opened and old Mr. Rimmer, happy and smiling, stepped into the room; into the very center of the tragic crisis. He looked at them but saw nothing. The young people forced a smile and the old man said, quite cheerily:

"I am afraid I am disturbing you . . . is there some secret you are keeping from me?"

He looked at them searchingly, but laughed and was satisfied, convinced, as he left the room, that they were discussing some very important subject, such as the color of the new dining-room furniture or should they take apartments in the lower or upper part of the town. . . .

And this insignificant incident of her father's visit broke the tension that had held them silent and made talk between them possible.

"Did you have any conversation with the girl who brought you this letter?" Nicholas asked.

"Yes."

"What did she tell you?"

"She repeated practically all that is in the letter."

"She didn't say anything else?"

Lenke looked at the figure in the carpet and did not reply: which made the answer seem a matter of grave consequence. Nicholas repeated the

question with some traces of excitement in his voice:

"Did she say anything else?"

The girl looked up and her eyes seemed to show the reflection of hidden fires. Then as if she were making a very serious confession, she said:

"Yes, she did say something else."

"What did she say?"

"She said that if you had wanted to, you could have prevented the development of this—this situation. And besides . . ."

"If I had wanted to . . ."

"Now, don't interrupt me," said Lenke rather emphatically. "If I have at last made up my mind to talk, and have collected my strength to do it, you should at least not interrupt, but listen to me patiently."

"But . . ."

"Listen to me. She told me that you knew you stirred this girl's emotions, involuntarily, I admit—that you knew this pitiful creature was fall-

ing in love with you. And if that is the case, and if you were aware of the situation and if you did not break off relations of every kind with her immediately, you committed a grave offense against me. . . ."

"But consider, please, that I have undertaken to defend her and that her liberty depends on me. . . ."

A fleeting but bitter smile was the answer to this.

"And you smile at that?"

He did not understand how Lenke could smile at such a statement; he did not know that every Lenke in the world would have smiled. What do men know of the tempests and storms that rage in the little white rooms of young girls everywhere?

"Of course I am smiling at it," she said, and the first tear glistened under her eyelashes. "Of course, I am smiling at it, for if one loves some one and in return is beloved by that some one,

there is no such thing as thought of freedom . . . not if it concerns any one else. . . ."

This at least was straightforward, candid even though it was egotistic; the egotism of a child.

It struck home, too, and gave Nicholas a clear glance into the unspoiled and unsophisticated soul of this young girl. He said gently:

"That's different."

Feeling, however, that he must seek for further excuses, he added:

"But it's not the main question."

"Well, what is the main question?"

"The main question is that I am absolutely indifferent to this girl. I didn't care whether she was or was not in love with me. I didn't care a fig. She did not interest me. I wouldn't ever have believed that . . ."

He could not continue the sentence; his embarrassment closed his lips, he could not tell her that he would never have believed that this love of Riza's would ever grow to such proportions; that

he would never have believed that her passion would ever touch the threshold of this little white room. He would never have believed that Riza Nagy would ever interest him in any capacity other than that of a client; that as a woman in love with him or with any other man, for that matter—she could never enter his mind.

These were truths, but such truths as were better left unspoken, thought Nicholas.

That was just where the trouble lay, Lenke told him, that he had ignored the girl's passion for him; he should have known that she was in love with him and then his duty would have been to escape from the consequences of such an infatuation. . . .

She said this with the serious air of a sage; one who carried all the wisdom of all the world at the tips of her fingers, as one who could put those finger-tips instantly on the root of the trouble and point out the solution.

Nicholas began to feel a little more easy. He

somehow saw that this unspoiled child was not such a complicated soul after all, that one should be able to drive out of her mind this stupid fear, which to him seemed unwarranted. And, the Lord knows, in spite of his humiliation, he was glad of the discovery, glad of the prospect of extricating himself from the awkward situation into which a foolish girl had dragged him. So he began to talk with calmness and with all the reasoning he could command:

"I never troubled about her and I don't trouble about her now, either," he said. "The sure proof of the statement that I have not troubled and never cared for her is . . . that I don't care about her now. If she loves me—let her. I am going to do my duty by her as a lawyer—and then, good-by. . . ."

But this light and confident tone did not work. Lenke answered quickly and emphatically. It was as if she had suddenly grown up.

"I shall not permit you to see her again, or say

another word to her, as long as you live. Do you understand me?"

"I do," said Nicholas quite meekly.

"That you are not going to see her again?"

"I understand."

"And I demand that if you should receive any sort of communication from that creature, you will tell me at once."

She looked at Nicholas inquiringly as if she wanted to avoid asking him: "Will you promise me to do that?"

"I promise you," he said, smiling. He wanted to rob the scene of its seriousness with that smile.

"You needn't smile," said Lenke.

"Why not?"

"Because it means that you regard me as a stupid little creature, who need not be taken seriously, whose fears may be allayed with a smile."

"Not at all," Nicholas protested, but not convincingly.

"Please don't deny it. . . . I feel it. . . . Promise me in all seriousness. . . ."

"Well, I promise in all seriousness."

"Give me your hand," Lenke demanded.

"Here you are."

"This means your word of honor, doesn't it?"

"It does."

They looked at each other very earnestly. There was something in their mutual gaze that gave them assurance they would belong to each other all their lives.

"I am comforted now," said Lenke, and then she added: "I have another request."

"What is that?"

"I don't want my father to know anything about all this. Not a word."

"Why not? You are taking it seriously after all?"

"I certainly am. Do promise me that, too."

"I promise."

For the first time she smiled. It was evident

that she was satisfied. She looked on Nicholas as an inexperienced boy, who had been dragged into danger, and whom she had saved by her superior wisdom, from certain destruction. Being a girl, and seventeen, she was wiser and older than Nicholas at twenty-five.

She said softly:

"Now . . ." and lifted her lovely little head.

Nicholas leaned over her and kissed her forehead very tenderly and most affectionately.

And he, too, felt happy at this moment when his lips touched her broad white brow. But when she looked into his eyes again, some foreboding clutched his heart.

He had a presentiment that this tender little scene that they had just enacted, this honest and old-fashioned show of sentiment was but the thin covering to tragedy that lay beneath.

He had a feeling that the case of Riza Nagy had not been closed and that the veil that had been spread over it was like oil poured on the surface of a stormy sea. The wild waves that gain

their power from the very depths of the seas will suddenly surge upward and scatter the oily surface into a thousand little glittering drops. . . . There was some irresistible strength, some raw power, a sense of unconquerable wildness in Riza's long letter; and some of its sentences were still burning in his heart as if tiny lamps had been set alight at the root of every vein. The letter was crowded—between the lines as well as within—with embittered frenzy, with a desperation such as must have driven the cave women of our ancestors to fight with each other for their males. And it seemed clear to him that Lenke, with her urbanity, with her social propriety and with all the wisdom and strength that good breeding and culture might give, would be swept away in this tempest of emotion and that not a trace of her would be left. . . .

Somehow or other this Riza Nagy grew out of the letter, large and potent. There was burning temperament in her; powerful intellect for an uneducated girl, and unbridled will. . . .

Nicholas became frightened at the very thought. The love of comfort began to assert itself in him; so characteristic of the ordinary bourgeois; the laziness of soul, that closes the eyes when danger is sensed. His sense of security began to be threatened; and the fear of the unusual, of sleepless nights, of the necessity for thinking, pondering, solving unfamiliar problems, all these appeared to him as menacing, if distant ghosts. The Nicholases of this world are only happy in lukewarm baths, and they love the noise of battle only from a distance. They shrink from the very idea of having to arm and mobilize their souls.

These were the feelings that lay hold of Nicholas, feelings that would have come to thousands of other young men in similar situations. And now he began to see that what had dragged him into this complication was nothing else but the stubborn love of comfort, that dwelt in his little soul. That unheeding and uncaring laziness

which made him flee from the troubles of others and which had silenced the echoes within his own heart in response to the unbounded love of Riza . . . something that had whispered to him: "Don't you worry, don't you bother with it, you are not interested in that, why excite yourself . . . it is she who suffers and it is her business."

But now it was a little too late. The girl to whom he was pledged was standing before him, smiling and true, her last words were: "Now I am comforted," and yet there was a hidden nervousness in her smile, and there was a forced tone in her voice as she declared herself to be comforted.

And then there was the letter on the table between them; it lay there like a wedge that sinks deeper and deeper of its own weight, separating them farther and farther from each other. The sickly sentiments of the prison girl were burning there on the paper—this uncouth, uncut, uncared-

for and bitter love which seemed to contain all the suffering, all the misery that rose from the past, which Riza called her own.

Now it was too late. There was nothing one could do to change things; not with smiles nor promises, nor kisses, could one solve this problem now.

The door opened again.

"Lunch is ready, children," said old Rimmer, and he looked at them again, and again saw nothing.

CHAPTER X

Sloshing along the muddy roads with Sebfi and Bella the cab reached the city at last, although it was hard to imagine that it ever would. The dainty silk and the shabby clothes sat beside each other in intimate proximity. Bella had put on her best for her important call on the warden's daughter; but Sebfi's old clothes had not seen a brush for days and the dust sat on them thick and gray.

Their clothes actually characterized the situation. Bella's shiny silk dress and her rustling silk undergarments, her feathered hat, represented diplomacy, while Sebfi's rags symbolized his clumsy bluntness.

And their conversation, too, was in harmony with their respective costumes. Bella's speech was silk and suave, while Sebfi's mutterings were harsh and raw.

The girl, for instance, said:

"Be careful, my friend. Don't slam the door when you get out."

And Sebfi growled:

"The best thing I could do would be to buy a revolver."

Then Silk said with a smile:

"You are far too strenuous, my friend. If you wish to succeed you must be shrewd and cautious. Step lightly and be always on the lookout."

And Rags raged:

"Damn caution. All there is left for me to do is to break and crush. And I am going to show them."

They dismissed the cab at the People's Theater, and Bella went in at the stage door to see if the rehearsal had begun.

In a moment she returned, her face beaming.

"No, they haven't begun yet."

"When will they begin?" Sebfi grumbled.

"Not for half an hour."

"Then . . ." but he went no further, biting off his sentence as though it were his enemy's head.

In silence he stared toward Kerepesi Avenue where the cabs and fiacres rolled along in slow procession, and the flower venders, in the pale sunshine proclaimed the coming of spring. God only knows where these queer city flowers come from, for the fields are bare at this time of the year, and yet they blossom on every street corner. There is advance booking even for the spring and at a small expense, you see.

Sebfi suddenly turned around, so suddenly that the girl in silks was startled by the movement.

"Bella," he said, "I have a mad idea."

"Let's hear it."

"But I shall need your most discreet cooperation."

"You shall have it, my friend." Bella was all graciousness.

"Even more; I shall need your self-sacrificing cooperation."

"You shall have that, too," with a fine gesture of generosity.

To Miss Bella, along with her kind—this meant something less than absolute discretion and but a little self-sacrifice. That's nothing! Not worth going to the neighbors for. There is plenty of it at home.

Sebfi took her by the arm.

"Let's walk up and down in front of the theater for a little while. I want to tell you of my plan."

And as they walked back and forth, greeting the actors as they arrived for the rehearsal, Sebfi talked mysteriously, in a stage whisper, as the villains do in bloody dramas when they conspire to kidnap the heroine.

"Look here, Bella, there is only one thing that can help me out in this."

"And what is that, my friend?"

"If I should have a talk with that girl."

"Which one?"

"Miss Rimmer," whispered Sebfi.

Bella suddenly stopped.

"Does that surprise you?"

To tell the truth, Bella did not stop so suddenly because of anything Sebfi had said, but because just at that moment an elegant fiacre drew up in front of the theater and a small curly-haired young woman alighted from it. To tell the truth again, the small curly-haired young woman—a chorus girl by the name of Rozsi Somogyi—had arrived in a private carriage, and that was what caused Miss Bella to stop so abruptly. But why shouldn't poor Sebfi have the satisfaction of being the author of her surprise? So she said:

"That is really very surprising."

Sebfi went on:

"For look here. What is the situation? It is this: Riza is in love with the lawyer, and we can't deny that the lawyer, too, is beginning to be interested in Riza. It's no use shutting our eyes. One has to look facts square in the face. I saw it . . . I know it. I feel it. And if I know Riza at all, I

know that she is going to struggle for this man, fight for him to the last ditch. Consequently . . ."

He noticed that Bella was looking away from him.

"Aren't you listening, Miss Bella?"

The girl quickly turned her gaze from the private carriage.

"Of course I am listening."

"Then look at me. Consequently . . . I have to conspire with some one whose natural interest lies in having this affair nipped in the bud, in having Nicholas and Riza kept apart. It is a matter of simple logic. Who is naturally most interested? Lenke Rimmer. Am I right?"

"You are right, Sebfi; you are wonderful."

Miss Bella's interest was really aroused. But she made a mouth as if to say "You are right, but what have I got to do with the affair?" Still she felt greatly honored by the fact that she had become one of the characters,

even if a minor one, in a great love drama. So she looked at him and listened intently.

"I must speak to her," said Sebfi.

"Exactly the right thing to do."

"I must speak to her, and to do it I need your help."

"My help? But I . . ."

"Don't try to wriggle out of it, please. You know her, you have already spoken to her, have seen her at her home. For my sake you will go to see her again and will arrange an interview for me."

"You mean to go there, yourself?"

"Not for the world," exclaimed Sebfi.

"What then?"

"We must meet somewhere else, she and I."

Silk smiled at Rags' innocence.

"You are crazy, Sebfi. You think this young lady will make a date with you somewhere in the city park?"

"I believe she will."

"Don't be foolish. . . ."

"You don't understand. But it doesn't matter, for it is not necessary that you should understand. You either do what I ask of you, or you don't. If that girl refuses to meet me, that's my own private misfortune . . . and her private misfortune. But I will say this, that I will bite my own head off if she refuses to meet me at the first request for a rendezvous."

This saying might have been invented especially for Sebfi. He was always ready to bite his own head off. At the stage door a sharp, commanding little bell began to ring.

"I must go in," said Bella, "that's the call for rehearsal."

Sebfi grasped her by the arm.

"Just a minute."

"What else do you want?"

"You are not going to run away, my lady. Promise that you will go to see that girl in my behalf."

"I promise."

"When?"

"To-morrow. Right?" Bella asked impatiently.

Sebfi made an ironic gesture with both hands.

"To-morrow, to-morrow. . . . Not right at all."

"When then, when do you want me to go?"

"To-day."

Bella tore herself away from him and ran toward the stage door. On the threshold she turned back and shouted:

"You are crazy, Sebfi, absolutely crazy. As crazy as a regular lunatic."

The young fellow looked after her with bitterness in his heart and contempt on his face.

"She, too, deserts me," he soliloquized. "I am left to my own devices. I am all alone, as alone as a lonely oak on the bleak mountain ranges."

He compressed his lips, and threw his head back defiantly. He even threw out his chest,

though this he always did, unconsciously, when he soliloquized. And really at this moment he did look like a deserted tree on a bleak mountain, his head up, his arms outflung, defying all the storms in the universe. . . .

Then he turned and rushed away from the neighborhood of the theater, the skirts of his broad overcoat flying behind him as he ran, colliding with every one and everything appropriate for the purpose. He stopped at the first café he came to and asking for paper and pen, began to write a letter. It was a long letter for it covered more than a half-dozen sheets of paper. When he finished writing he read what he had written, and seemed greatly satisfied. Then he read it again and again and when he had read it for the fourth time, he tore it to pieces.

After chewing the end of the penholder for some time, he settled down and again began to write. This time with apparent approval, for eventually he folded the paper and placed it in an

envelope, wrote the address and sent it off by a porter and this is the inscription the envelope bore:

Miss Lenke Rimmer
Old City Prison
Private.

The porter strode off with it, taking long steps, pretending to hurry. And Sebfi sped him on his way with a proud smile.

"Ha, ha," he said to himself, "there goes the letter. It will soon be there. She will be reading it in no time."

The fact that the letter was on its way and that with every moment the distance between him and it grew, gave him a sense of joy and delight. He followed the porter with his eyes for some time and then he said to himself, half aloud:

"Sebfi, you have put the light to the torch, this time."

And in his mind's eye he saw the torch as its flames shot up to the housetops, the red tongues

of fire consuming everything that was hostile to him. And from this fire he saw his spirit arise; re-born and clean.

Sebfi's mind traveled on queer roads and rapidly. The porter on the other hand traveled much more slowly, and as he strolled along he speculated on whether he was to get forty or fifty kreutzers for the job.

CHAPTER XI

At noon the following day in the Jaulusz Eating Palace, where four courses were served for thirty kreutzers, not including wine, a nervous voice shouted:

"Cash."

Hedged about with strangers, at a table near the window, sat Sebfi. Three of the Jaulusz's four courses lay untouched before him. As the cashier in his faded frock coat, an old acquaintance of Sebfi's, appeared to collect for the dinner, the actor remarked in a tone full of ancient pride and lordly condescension:

"The food was very bad again to-day."

"Yes, sir," said the head waiter and brought his pencil to bear on the check, adding up the thirty kreutzers with ceremony enough to have distinguished the Ritz:

"Just put that back."

"Yes, sir."

"Charge it," demanded Sebfi who was already at the door. The head waiter looked after him for a second, then he pocketed his large wallet and went on with his work. These "charged" thirty kreutzers were the best debts ever.

"He'll pay," the head waiter said to himself, "when he's a member of the National Theater."

The National Theater keeps the courage in these poor head waiters in the provinces as well as in Budapest. If all those young actors and actresses who live on credit for months in the hope that they will one day reach the stage of the National Theater, were really to achieve it, the great national institution would have more members than the Austro-Hungarian army ever had. It is the life ambition of every one of them but not one in a hundred of the new generation reach the coveted goal.

Sebfi dashed through the numerous little streets

that led him by the shortest route to the city park. His loose overcoat was not flying after him this time, for it was a beautiful, sunny day, so beautiful that even the dirty little streets seemed to have improved in appearance under its spell. But had there been no sunshine, if blinding rain had flooded the streets, Sebfi would have rushed along just the same, as indifferent to the wet as he was to the beauty and brightness that lay about him.

He hurried through the fine and exclusive parts of the city park and headed directly toward the scenic railway, its roar and rumble audible a mile away. Behind the railway, just back of the shows, less than a stone's throw from the clatter and noise of this popular fun-market, there is a quiet and deserted spot. There Sebfi stopped, looked about him and resigned himself to wait. He leaned, he posed, against a tree, and after a long search in his pockets he succeeded in finding a dissolute, miserable-looking cigarette,

which he straightened and lit. There is no satisfaction like that of a good cigarette after a good lunch . . . or even a bad one.

He suddenly recalled Bella's words: "You don't really imagine that a decent young girl will make a date with you at the first call?" Then he smiled. "Nothing is taken seriously in this serious world," he said to himself, "not even that a decent girl of a good family is supposed not to go to a clandestine appointment with a young man. As long as the secret meeting involves no dishonorable intentions, why shouldn't a respectable girl be allowed to meet a respectable young man in the city park? Nothing is taken seriously in this world. Not even respectability." He recalled that it is so even in plays. If the heroine is invited to a rendezvous by letter, she will certainly appear either in the first act or the second, or at the words, in the third act, but appear she will. . . . He no longer doubted that Lenke Rimmer would keep the appointment, and he scru-

tinized every passing young woman with the eye of an expert and a philosopher. This scrutiny was all the more interesting because of the fact that he did not know Lenke Rimmer, never having set eyes on her, and it was his great wish to recognize her, despite this evident handicap. He was quite sure that he would know her at the first glance.

And how eagerly he watched! Right and left, and to the front of him; in fact, he looked in every direction except behind him—there are people, you know, who can attribute all their misfortunes to the fact that they have never remembered to look behind. . . . Then suddenly a timid, girlish voice reached his ears.

"Have I the honor of addressing Mr. Wundt?"

He turned around.

"Yes, I am Mr. Wundt. . . ."

Lenke stood beside him. She knew his friends called him Sebfi, but she did not dare address him by that name, a nick-name, and besides Sebfi took

the matter so seriously that he had signed his family name to the letter: "Wundt."

The girl summoned up her courage:

"I am Lenke Rimmer . . . and . . . and . . ."

She could not go on for a moment, but at last managed to say:

"And I came."

Now it was Sebfi's turn to say something, and it was his turn, also, to stammer a little; so he said:

"And I . . . I am here. . . ."

This was the way they introduced themselves. And after having got through the embarrassing preliminaries, Sebfi regained some of his composure and began to lay the foundation of a conversation:

"Come, Miss Rimmer," he said, "let's walk about a little. It will not last long, this business of ours. Thank you for coming. Although . . ."

"Although?"

"Although I know that you have not come for my sake, but for your own. For to tell you the truth I didn't come for your sake either, but to save my own hide. . . . You see, that's what interests me the most. . . ."

"Funny fellow," thought Lenke and took a good look at the man. On the whole he was just as she had pictured him after Nicholas' description. But Sebfi left her no time to examine him as a curiosity, for he began to talk business immediately.

"I am in possession of serious data," he said with a mysterious face.

He could have said: "I know some serious things," or "I want to tell you some serious things," but Sebfi would not have been Sebfi if in the circumstances he had not used high-sounding words, such as being in possession of data, of a serious nature.

The girl looked at him:

"What is that?" she asked.

"It is about Nicholas."

"I know. What about him?"

"Well . . . well. . . . It's a matter of being in love. . . ."

"How? . . . How? . . . She is in love . . ."

"Your fiancée is in love," Lenke started to say, but she changed her mind.

"No," said Sebfi. "It is more than that."

"Nicholas?"

"Yes."

"Is he in love with your . . ."

Sebfi nodded, indicating that she guessed right. Lenke suddenly stopped, as if something cold had flashed down her back. One feels a kind of suffocation in the throat at such times, a sort of wave that descends from the throat down the spine, not even stopping at one's feet, but goes on deep into the earth. . . . That is why they say: "His feet were rooted to the ground." Lenke had this feeling for the first time in her life. Softly she asked:

"He loves her?"

"Yes."

"And you . . . how do you know?"

"I have seen it."

He looked at her in surprise, expecting every instant that she would burst into tears. She controlled herself, however, and wide-eyed, unbelieving, she said:

"You have seen it?"

"Yes. Yesterday morning in the prison."

"What did you see?"

"He caressed her hair. Yes. I was waiting outside. That is, I was not waiting outside: I put my head through the partly open door, to find out why he was not coming, and why it took so long and what had happened. Well . . ." He stopped for a moment, then he continued:

"And he was caressing her hair. . . . The girl you see . . . bent a bit forward toward him . . . and he too . . . leaned forward . . . toward her and, and . . ."

"And?"

"And . . . that's all . . ."

Sebfi breathed deep and made a twisted face as one who has just reached the fourth story after a hurried climb.

Poor Lenke felt exactly the reverse: somewhat as if she had only that moment landed after a long fall, on the hard pavement. . . .

"With my own eyes," Sebfi added.

They were both silent now. Lenke looked about her at these strange and unfamiliar scenes. From a distance the noise of the merry-go-rounds and the scenic railway came rushing through the trees and shrubbery. A near-by hurdy-gurdy ground out its popular airs; soldiers, unusually in threes, walked past them happy and satisfied with their lot . . . then a couple of servant girls laughing, and in a flirtatious mood. Lenke's world began to whirl a little, a fact all the more exasperating inasmuch as it had always, heretofore, stood nice and still for her; she had never come in contact with it when it was not stationary.

Somehow she succeeded in keeping her balance in the midst of this whirling. She looked at Sebfi and felt that her gaze holding his was the only stay she could rely on to keep her from falling. She looked at him almost rigidly; it was as if her eyes were grasping him for support.

Then she said:

"What are we going to do?"

He did not answer, so she repeated the question.

"What are we going to do?"

A faint smile appeared around Sebfi's lips.

"What are you smiling at?"

"Because you said: 'What are *we* going to do?' This *we* makes me smile. I like it. . . . I gather from it that you realize, you feel our interests are common; that we shall have to work together, act in unison; that we, not having known each other five minutes, are at this moment the most loyal and most dependable friends. We have been thrown together that we might fight out our destinies together. . . ."

The girl stubbornly adhered to her question:

"What are we going to do now?"

This time Sebfi assumed the counseling voice of the old and the wise:

"There are many things we could do just now. But it will not avail us if we hurry things and neglect proper precautions."

"What,then, do you advise?"

"Don't be impatient, please. . . . What I do know is this: the girl's case will come up in court early next week. There it will be decided whether Riza will be sentenced to prison or not. . . ."

The girl interrupted him impatiently:

"This . . . this part of the affair is what you are interested in. I am not going to wait as long as that . . . I want to know now, everything. . . ."

"Please, Miss Rimmer . . . try to control yourself. You will have to wait until then. I will tell you why. If they sentence Riza to prison —and here comes the part you are interested in— you will have nothing more to trouble about. In

that case, it will have been merely an insignificant little flare-up, as far as Nicholas is concerned, which will be stifled by the prison itself, the damp atmosphere of the jail. . . ."

He said this so fluently, so dramatically, that he was perfectly satisfied with himself; so much so, that his tears began to flow.

Lenke looked at him amazed.

"Are you crying?" she asked.

"Very genuinely, Miss Rimmer, very genuinely."

He wiped his tears and ceased crying as if by order.

"As I say, in that case, the affair is closed as far as you are concerned. But if they should happen to acquit her or if we should succeed in softening old Kore's heart at the last moment and he should withdraw his complaint, then the trouble will begin."

Again Lenke repeated with worried face and despairing eyes:

"What are we to do?"

"We are going to wait. But . . . we are going to wait together, Miss Rimmer. We shall have to meet often and exchange our impressions . . . and . . ."

At this confidential moment, some one grasped Sebfi's right hand, just as he was about to gesture with it, to emphasize his point.

It was Maria. Maria, the severe.

She grasped his hand and then pushed him aside, as if he had been some piece of furniture blocking the way. Turning to Lenke, she commanded:

"You must come home immediately."

Lenke could find no words of protest, she was too greatly surprised, too weak, too miserable to offer any resistance.

"You must come," said Maria, as she led her away, "and next time don't leave letters from crazy people lying about."

CHAPTER XII

In old Mr. Rimmer's office, out in the big yellow building, people came and went in an endless procession; lawyers, relatives of prisoners, prison guards and other people, such as the contractors and tradesmen who supplied the institution with foodstuffs and materials for labor. And from the big room, where the old gentleman ruled, his commands, his orders and directions could be heard even beyond the corridors, as he shouted:

"It can't be done!—I can not permit it!—I forbid you to do so!—I do not agree— No, sir, you can't!"

There seemed to be a "no" in every sentence he uttered and they sounded harsh and hostile. Those who left his office on this particular day, wore long faces and could not understand what had brought on this unusual mood. They had never seen him in a temper before.

"What can be the matter with the old man?"

The prison guards shrugged their shoulders. He was as soft, as a rule, as a slice of newly baked bread. There must be something very serious the matter.

Toward noon Maria appeared at the door of the office. Her appearance took the form of a push and a shove. The guard, being well acquainted with Maria, simply smiled and stood aside, good-naturedly.

As she entered the office, she saw a sergeant of the guards bending over a large sheet of paper spread out on the warden's table. The sergeant was reporting his accounts; Rimmer was checking the figures with a blue pencil. But when he saw Maria, he folded up the paper and snapped at the sergeant:

"All right, you can go."

"But, sir . . . "

The old gentleman looked at him and lowered his brows:

"Come in the afternoon, I am busy now."

Maria had already seated herself in a great armchair, and was waiting, with every expression of annoyance that the sergeant was still in the room. She would have liked to have thrown something at him to hasten his going. The sergeant sensed this, judging from the glance he gave her as he left the office. No, one could not say with any degree of assurance that the prison guards liked Maria. As a matter of fact, some of them would have rejoiced if they had an opportunity to give her a thorough beating; she was too masculine and too severe-looking for their taste. When the sergeant closed the door behind him—with all the respect due his superior officer—Rimmer stepped up to Maria and demanded:

"What have you been doing? Did you find her?"

"Yes. I have accomplished everything."

"Where is the girl?"

(The "girl." This was the creature formerly called "my daughter.")

"She is in her room, crying. She locked the door and when I knocked she wouldn't let me in."

"Why not?"

"Because she is very angry with me."

"Outrageous."

"And I told her quite calmly that if she refused to open the door, I'd kick it in."

Rimmer smiled. He couldn't help smiling.

"I haven't tiny dancing feet, and she knew it; knew I could kick the door in. So she opened it. But she wouldn't talk to me. I tried to make her tell, but in vain. First she went to the window and cried. Then she sat at the table and wept there for a time. I understand these things. So I decided to go to the city and try to find out what happened, on my own. I wanted to see things clearly; that's all."

"Did you find Nicholas?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said he was in despair over it; that he was innocent of everything; that the whole affair is of no consequence, and that he would come out here this afternoon."

"Good. I'm glad he is coming out."

"Well—that is—as a matter of fact . . . he will not come out."

"Why not, I should like to know?"

"Because I told him not to. In the hope that you would approve I told him it was your wish that he stay away until he was asked to come. Have I done right?"

The old gentleman did not answer immediately. He paced the room for a while with head bent, twisting his mustaches, then, after a deep sigh, he said:

"You have done right, Maria. You women know how to manage such things much better than we men do. If you hadn't found that crazy

fellow's letter we would still be in the dark about the whole affair; we wouldn't have known what was actually going on around us."

Maria received the acknowledgment with indifference.

"Then I spoke to that crazy fellow," she said.

"How so? Did you find him?"

"Yes. They sent me to some theater where he was hanging around. At first he was frightened, for he recognized me, of course. But finally he condescended to talk to me."

"What did he say?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He declaimed, he recited a piece."

"What do you mean, he recite?"

"The words were all right in themselves, but as he put them together I couldn't make head or tail out of them. Though I must admit he could recite very nicely."

"And he didn't tell you anything worth while?"

"He said that the dishonest creature had

turned Nicholas' head. That she had succeeded in inveigling him."

The old man was silent. This was what he feared, what, he realized now, he had expected. All that had been said before was but introduction to it. He sat down at his desk.

"What's going to happen next?"

Maria answered with an air of wisdom:

"Something or other will happen."

"I am going to write to Nicholas," said the old gentleman.

Maria looked at him in surprise, then she said quietly:

"You are not going to do anything of the kind."

"Then I shall have to see him."

"You are not going to see him, either."

"What then?" The old warden seemed quite humble.

Maria was very proud of herself. At last she had satisfaction for all the indignities she had

suffered. Now she was the master mind, she was the commander-in-chief, the doctor in the house, the adviser. Overnight she had become the person of first importance in the establishment; for the moment she felt that it was she and not Rimmer who managed this sullen old prison-house.

"What then, I say. What am I to do?"

"You are going to leave everything to me."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I am going to talk to that creature. I shall go and see her at the city prison."

"When?"

"At once. The case will come up at the tribunal the day after to-morrow. The whole thing is a matter of three hundred guldens. This is my plan: if you will listen to me. I am going to see this girl and find out how serious the affair with Nicholas is. If it is not serious, I shall not bother about her any more. But if it's serious, we shall bargain with the young lady. The confectioner, from whom she stole, refuses to with-

draw the charge. We are going to tell her that we will save her from prison, pay the money to the confectioner and persuade him to withdraw the charge. On her part, she will leave the city at once and promise to break off all relations, all connections with Nicholas."

Rimmer looked at her with wide-open eyes.

"What then? Are *you* willing that Nicholas should continue to come to the house—after all that has happened?"

Maria spoke as if she were the mother of wisdom.

"This is one of those affairs that ought not to be taken seriously; even if it were more serious than it is. Consider Nicholas—a fine, decent and honorable fellow who may be fumigated out of this thing in a week, if properly handled. But that is not the main reason. The main reason is that if we should solve the problem without Nicholas, our little girl will die, she will not be able to get over it. That's the trouble."

Rimmer stared at her:

"What did you say?"

"I said that she is not going to get over it. She'll die. I am the only one that understands. You don't know anything about it. You are not competent to judge in matters of this kind at all. And don't you think for a moment that your man's mind in such emergencies is equal to my old-womanish brain. The best thing for you to do under the circumstances is to acquiesce in everything I suggest, or decide to do."

The old man liked this arbitrary, military tone. Only those who have gone through great trouble, who have faced terrifying problems, can appreciate the presence of one who has a quick and dominant way of meeting a situation, who shows decisive character and acts promptly with a firm hand.

"Maria, you are a blessed creature and I'll leave everything to you. The only condition I make is that you tell me of everything and keep

me in touch with the situation as new developments arise."

"And you promise not to interfere?"

"I promise."

"And will you promise, also, that you'll not blame me for anything that goes wrong, or throw it up to me that you, with your man's mind, would have done it better?"

"I promise you even that, Maria."

"In that case everything is settled. You may rest assured that I shall manage things perfectly and to everybody's satisfaction. And now . . ."

"Let's go and have lunch."

"No. The little girl must have her lunch in her room. You have yours alone in the dining-room and don't try to see her at all."

"And what about you?"

"I shall have my lunch at Jaulusz's . . . four courses for thirty kreutzers."

"But why?"

"Because I have an appointment there with the

crazy man. I am to go to the prison with him to see that creature. . . ."

You do not know Sebfi, if you think it would have annoyed him to know that both Maria and old Rimmer always spoke of him as the crazy man. Sebfi would have been proud of it, would have gloried in it. He would rather have been known and crazy, than unknown and sane—sane and commonplace, in the ordinary sense of the word.

They shook hands gravely, and then Maria said:

"You'd better have the money ready."

"How much?"

"At least three hundred. Then a fifty-gulden bill . . . who knows, possibly it will come in handy. The crazy man will perhaps accompany the young lady to the provinces, partly so that she'll not be without a chaperon and partly because it's better to be sure that she doesn't turn back at the railway station."

Rimmer was delighted with this wonderful show of foresight.

"What a shrewd woman you are."

And the shrewd woman left the room proud and confident; secure also in her position with the old man, who was quite certain that she grasped the situation fully: the momentary delusion of Nicholas, the flare-up of the crazy man, and the mercenary motives of the waitress, who was merely out to make a little money and gain her freedom in the bargain.

This was the way Maria saw things, and Maria did trust her own judgment. She walked through the barred gate proudly, quite sure of her ability to solve all the problems and banish all the sorrows of this ragged and miserable humanity which crowds the earth's surface and never knows how to manage its own affairs. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

At Jaulusz's, the table next to the window, Sebfi had lunch with Maria. They were alone, no one was put with them and the much mentioned four courses were promptly spread before them. Sebfi would have gladly consumed them, but he was too nervous and excited to eat. Maria—and this was the difference between them—would have left the lunch, every course, untouched if she had been calm, but as it happened she was so wrought up that she ate every crumb of it, ate it in order that she might not seem nervous. When the last plate was removed, the head waiter put in an appearance with his familiar:

"Cash please?"

He was always delighted when his regular credit customers brought in company with them.

For then there was at least some hope of getting cash from the guest.

Maria put her thirty kreutzers on the table and looked at Sebfi.

"Aren't you paying for your lunch?"

"I'm sorry."

"Why not?"

Instead of offering an explanation, Sebfi, by a deprecatory smile, informed Maria that she had done something which in polite society would have been regarded as tactless. So to make amends, she opened her bag and deposited another thirty kreutzers on the table-cloth. Sebfi seemed about to protest, indeed he threatened Maria with declamation, but before he could begin the head waiter grabbed the thirty kreutzers and hurried away. It could not be helped and it could not be undone. What else could poor Sebfi do? So he laughed bitterly and the incident was closed.

Then they directed their steps toward the prison. Mind you, this was not the institution

over which old Rimmer presided, but the so-called tribunal prison where the unsentenced awaited their fate. Sebfi called at the office of the state's attorney and succeeded in getting permission for both of them to see Riza Nagy at once. They made a queer couple, these two. Maria, dressed in an old-fashioned style, a severe spinster-looking creature; and the long-haired, almost ragged fellow with her, in his broad-brimmed hat, obviously a would-be actor, even a mile away, and no mistake. A stranger seeing them for the first time would have thought with a good deal of justification that the old lady was a provincial matron and the young fellow her eccentric son who was studying art in the capital.

They walked along silently side by side. Sebfi —to be exact—made a few unsuccessful efforts to start a conversation, to lead Maria on to say something, but she would not take the hint. When they reached the corner on Alkotmany Street, where the prison is situated, Sebfi said:

"Do you think perhaps . . ."

But Maria simply slew him with a look. The rest of the sentence froze on poor Sebfi's lips. Two houses farther on he took another chance:

"If you only knew this girl . . ."

The old woman looked at him with such utter contempt and disgust that Sebfi thought better of it and again left the sentence uncompleted. And so he resigned himself to silence and gave up his right of speech. It might be said he was sleep-walking beside her.

A few minutes more and they were sitting in the warden's office, from which they were ushered into the visitor's room to await the prisoner. It was here that Maria spoke for the first time since they had left Jaulusz's. In a quiet tone of authority and the manner of a commander-in-chief she said:

"And now, please, remember that *I* am going to talk to this girl. Do you understand?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"You will not say a single word. You will silently acquiesce in everything I say or do, for the simple reason that whatever I say or do will serve your purpose as well as mine. Am I right, sir?"

"You are right, ma'am."

"So you will refrain from any of your dramatic recitals."

Sebfi looked at her with sad eyes, as if to say: "Why make fun of me, a poor comedian?"

Maria, seeing that she had wounded him, tried to make amends by saying something that, to her, sounded friendly. She blurted out:

"Don't look at me with such a miserable face, and above all don't babble, don't join in the conversation."

"Babble?" growled Sebfi. "How so, madame, have I reached the point where the woes of my soul may be described as babbling?"

A conflict was almost inevitable and it would have broken loose that instant, inaugurated with a great speech from Sebfi, had it not been cut

short by the sudden appearance of Riza Nagy. The prison guard in his blue uniform stopped on the threshold, and leaned against the door-post, prepared to wait until the interview was over.

Riza stepped into the room, paused, and looked at her visitors coldly, inquiringly. Had Sebfi been there alone, she would have simply turned around and gone back to her cell. But the other caller, the woman in the old-fashioned dress, piqued her curiosity, and she waited.

Sebfi jumped from the armchair in which he sat or rather lay, and rushed toward the girl. He snatched her hand and kissed it. Riza said nothing, but suffered his demonstrations without apparent concern, let alone emotion.

Then Maria arose in her most majestic manner and spoke to the girl quietly:

"Is it Miss Riza Nagy, I have the pleasure of speaking to?"

Riza smiled ironically.

"If you call it pleasure . . ."

This silenced Maria for a moment.

"If you will permit me . . . I . . . I am a relative of Warden Rimmer and I came to . . ."

"I know."

"What do you know?"

"I know why you came to see me."

"I don't think you could know anything about it, Miss Nagy."

"But I do. You came to make certain proposals to me. I do not pretend to know what those proposals may be, but if I'm not mistaken, and I imagine I'm not—judging from appearances, the way you introduced yourself and from everything else—you came to propose that I should resign my claim on Nicholas, and leave him alone. Am I right?"

Maria looked at her startled. Here was some one who could hit the nail on the head even more decisively than herself. She became embarrassed as she stammered:

"But . . . I beg your pardon . . . I . . ."

At this Riza sat down and began to talk as if she were the grand dame, issuing orders to her housekeeper, the still standing Maria.

"Now I am quite satisfied that I was not mistaken," she said. "You either want to offer me money or force me by threats to abandon my claim on Nicholas Chathy and let your niece, or whatever she is to you, have him. You are mistaken, madame. You will have to learn that the young girls who sleep in soft white beds and acquire English from ladies in silk, have no exclusive right to happiness just because they can buy expensive things for themselves. No, ma'am, I am going to show you that happiness is not being bought and sold for three hundred guldens, and I am going to prove to you that it isn't possible so to oil the wheels of life as to make them roll smoothly on all possible roads at all possible times. If we poor miserable wretches have to take the bumps on creaky and springless wheels, why shouldn't you have some little trouble with

your running gears, too? You get what I mean, madame?"

This was the most cruel stab of all, this "madame." Its inflection was such as to imply that to Maria she was an outsider in the Rimmer family, that she didn't really belong, that at best she was no more than a housekeeper who had been sent to the prison to talk to a girl who had been locked up for larceny, a task no respectable, well-bred person would undertake—to bargain with a criminal.

All this was unfolded and underlined in Riza's intonation of that word, "madame."

Sebfi's eyes were popping out of his head. As a man, he enjoyed this wild and courageous outburst. But as a lover, it nearly killed him, it tossed him into the dust bin, into the garbage heap. He could not stand it any longer, so he said:

"Madame, you will excuse me if I just 'babble' into this one-sided conversation. Miss Riza is not accustomed to such a tone."

But Maria was enraged. She too had had enough of it.

"What tone are you speaking of?" she said. "I haven't opened my mouth yet."

Riza softly put in:

"Sit down, my good woman, don't excite yourself."

"Good woman" was even more offensive than "madame." But as long as she had to stay, she sat down. She decided that she would chat with the prisoner, flatter her a little, wait till she softened, till she became sentimental, and then she would get the upper hand and would repay the loan with interest.

"Well, now will you tell me what it is you actually *want* to tell me?" asked Riza in a more friendly tone. "And you, Sebfi, hold your tongue," she added with a look of contempt.

"Yes, little Riza," was all he could answer, as he gazed at her tenderly, lovingly.

And Maria, having swallowed everything she would really like to tell the girl, began suavely:

"My cousin's daughter, Miss Lenke Rimmer, is affianced to your lawyer, Mr. Nicholas Chathy."

"That is a fact," said Scbfi, glad at the turn of the conversation into more civil channels. This time both of the women gave him a silencing glance. So he said to himself: I am everybody's dog, it seems, and he secretly determined not to open his mouth again.

"Mr. Chathy," said Maria, "was not clever enough to make it clear to you, Miss Nagy, that the sentiments you cherish in your heart for him not only fail to interest him, but are, to a man in his social position, engaged to be married, something of an insult."

Riza smiled: "Please go on, my good woman."

"You just wait," thought Maria. "I am going on all right, and I'm sure you won't be grateful for what I have to say to you." Then, aloud:

"It was a mistake on his part; but Mr. Chathy is a very sensitive man and has a kind heart and he would be loath to cause Miss Nagy, in her pres-

ent sad plight, any additional suffering. That's why I have come instead of Mr. Chathy; that's why I have undertaken this mission, to talk sensibly to you, Miss Nagy. These things are arranged much more easily by women, than by men, and besides I don't believe for a moment that you would intentionally block his way to happiness, especially if you really love him."

Riza was still smiling.

"Especially!" she repeated sarcastically.

Maria continued, taking no notice of the interruption: "We can talk things over pleasantly and in a perfectly friendly spirit. And Miss Nagy is very much mistaken if she believes that we want to buy her off for three hundred or any amount of guldens."

"Well, what then do you want with me?" asked Riza. "That you do want something, I assume from this visit, which was quite unsolicited."

Maria wished to be very clever, at the same time practical.

"All we want is to persuade you to use common sense," she said.

Riza was very calm, as she rose and said, quite casually:

"Let me tell you something, madame."

"Well?"

"It's very simple. I refuse to use common sense. You can set it down in your little book that on the day I put my hand into Mr. Kore's money-box I sent my common sense into retirement for a long time. It's resting now. As they say in the army, 'out of service.' Do you understand?"

"But, Miss Nagy, for goodness' sake . . ."

"I am not joking at all. I used my common sense until it was worn out. Now it needs a long rest. I guess that's about all."

Sebfi decided that it was about time for him to rise, and apparently Maria agreed with him, but as she got up, she gave the girl a glance in which she concentrated all the hatred and contempt she

felt. One does feel all sorts of contemptuous things for those who block one's way to success; and Riza was doing nothing short of that, Maria thought. Yet she didn't give up hope. She tried again:

"Miss Nagy is not willing to consider the case? Can't one really talk to you sensibly?"

"No."

"Not even if I remind you that your case will come up in court day after to-morrow and that I am in position to offer you the financial assistance that would enable you to escape jail sentence? Will you not listen to me, even then?"

Riza laughed, this time loudly and even more sarcastically. But she condescended to reply.

"That was expressed very delicately. But what it amounts to in plain, every-day Hungarian is—'three hundred guldens.' You had better leave me alone, you poor woman."

After "madame" and "good woman," "poor woman" was the most atrocious insult of all.

Maria could stand it no longer. She shrugged her shoulders and exclaimed:

"Well, what do I care if they lock you up?"

"That's the best thing you've said up to now," answered Riza.

With that she gestured to the prison guard as if he were her lackey, and her limousine awaited her at the gate.

Smiling and without another word, without even "good day," or a parting glance, Riza left her visitors, gaping and staring after her.

Sebfi wanted to say something, but what it was he himself did not know. His lips moved and his mouth opened and closed, not unlike a duck when too fat and out of breath. And Maria realizing that the crazy man was superfluous, so long as her scheme hadn't gone over with the girl, walked out by the other door, with never even a glance at poor Sebfi.

A solitary tear—the one that he could command so readily—traveled slowly down his cheek.

"How is it," he said to himself, "how is it that I am the only high-minded one of the lot, the only self-sacrificing, unselfish and honest person in the crowd—who tries to help everybody, and yet they insult me and leave me without as much as farewell."

"The room is needed for the next visitor, please leave by that door," cried a guard roughly, pointing to the exit by which Maria had left a moment before.

A spectacled young lawyer with the inevitable leather brief case under his arm, came in as Sebfi walked slowly away muttering:

"They're throwing me out now. What next, I wonder. What next?"

CHAPTER XIV

It was ten o'clock in the morning.

Three or four men were loitering outside the court room where the case was being tried. The reporter from a news-agency walked up to one of the idlers and asked:

"What case is on, Mr. Babos?"

Mr. Babos made a gesture of contempt.

"Nothing. Nothing for you. A little case of embezzlement involving three hundred guldens. Just a smear. . . ."

The reporter didn't wait to hear the last words. The case was closed for him as soon as he heard the mention of the sum. He rushed on up the staircase to the floor above.

A few sleepy people were waiting drowsily in the court room. The voice of the presiding judge sounded monotonous in the quiet morning atmos-

phere. In the name of His Majesty the King some one was sentenced to a few months of imprisonment, a poor shabby derelict. The judge murmured a few more words, the prosecutor said something too, the counsel for the defense collected his papers and the convict was led away. The administration of justice went on methodically, turning it out as if from a standardized factory. Where justice is distributed in such quantities—eight, ten or more cases in a morning—no one gets very excited. No, not even the culprit, for most of those who are brought here, have been here before. Just as certain poor dependents expecting alms call regularly for years the first of each month on their benefactors, so do these miserable specimens of the moral order appear before the judge, though not perhaps every month, nor always on the first. They come when their other protector, the police, stirs them up.

The judge, sitting in the center of the bench,

said something that was audible only to those close at hand. He murmured a number. The two other judges put the papers they had been examining to one side and seized another batch. The prosecuting attorney pulled out his desk drawer and reached into it up to his elbows. An attendant left the room. In the doorway, Nicholas Chathy appeared, paused for a moment, and then went up to the prosecuting attorney, exchanged a few words with him and took his seat at the lawyers' table. There was perfect silence. The audience remained as before. In the back seats, two men were already sleeping. Scattered about the room were four others, old gentlemen, then two men who must have come from the provinces and had dropped in merely out of curiosity, and a young law student who frequented the courts for the purpose of study. He had some notes in front of him from which he read.

As the prison guard escorted her through the long corridors, Riza Nagy laughed. She didn't

know why she laughed but she felt that she must, not from gaiety but because of some queer emotion which suddenly possessed her and reminded her of her wretchedness. She couldn't help it; she had to laugh. It was for this reason only that a few people gazed after her as she passed through the corridor toward the court room. But they didn't bother to follow her.

Mr. Kore took his seat on the bench reserved for the complainant. He wore a black frock-coat, spectacles on his nose and a certain glow of exaltation on his countenance. Like all simple and obscure souls, he felt the importance of his position among learned judges and distinguished lawyers. He didn't even glance at Nicholas—there was no indication that he had ever seen him before. Why should he? Wasn't he the most important figure in the opposition, in the anti-Riza party—he and the state's attorney, and the judges?

On the opposing side there were only the coun-

sel for defense, and the defendant, a criminal lawyer and a criminal, above whom Mr. Kore felt himself immeasurably removed.

There was Nicholas Chathy, pretending to be a respectable lawyer, defending a common thief, although he knew as well as any one that Riza had stolen, and he should with every respectable tax-paying citizen consider it his duty to see her safely in jail. Kore couldn't understand how Nicholas Chathy's sense of shame remained so undeveloped, after having studied law and coming as he did from such a good family.

The witnesses for the prosecution took but a short time. No one denied that Riza stole the money. She herself said nothing, indeed she appeared to be only slightly interested in the proceedings; she looked bored, as if she would like to say: "Please, Mr. Judge, hurry up and pass sentence upon me, for I am sick and tired of waiting here all morning."

Then the prosecuting attorney arose to speak.

His summing up was simple but vivid, such as he might have made in any petty three-hundred-gulden case. He emphasized the fact that Riza took advantage of a lonely old man's confidence, that she had deceived and defrauded one who had accepted her as a member of his family, entrusted her with the management of his business, and showered all sorts of benefits upon her.

Mr. Kore enjoyed the speech immensely. This prosecuting attorney was an intelligent man. He expressed Mr. Kore's sentiments in such a beautiful and adequate manner. It pleased him that a man whom he had never seen before in all his life could speak so feelingly and understandingly about him, could so sympathize with him in his trouble. And although he could not derive any personal benefit out of the affair, yet he took up Kore's case with great zeal and devotion; for the right was his. Why, he never even tasted one of Mr. Kore's pastries; Kore never had a chance to do him a favor, and yet how eloquently that re-

markable man presented his case to the judges, emphasized his client's loneliness and set forth his merits as a citizen. For the first time Kore realized what a fine and noble thing is the law, and how impartial, justice. How splendid it would be if this sympathy of the state's attorney should persist through the years and a lasting friendship develop out of this accidental meeting here in the court room. It was evident to old Kore that the prosecutor liked him, liked his business, and that his heart went out to him in his great sorrow. He felt that he ought to invite him to visit him at his shop, that he might try to compensate him for all the kindness expressed in his eloquent speech.

The prosecuting attorney roared out a few commonplace phrases on the subject of "the protection of honestly gained property," "the respectable earnings of respectable citizens," "the heartlessness of criminally inclined young people" and a number of other platitudes that are dear to

any prosecutor's heart. Then he demanded the extreme penalty for the thief, and sat down.

He was breathing hard. Mr. Kore would have liked to have gone over to him and wipe the perspiration from the great man's forehead. He perspired freely even after such a slight effort. But realizing that it would cause some mutual embarrassment, and that the presiding judge would reprimand any such demonstration in the court room, Kore resigned himself to inactivity and composed all his gratitude and sympathy and enthusiasm into one broad smile. But this smile—we have to admit—was really and truly a sweet one. His little eyes sparkled behind his spectacles, joy and satisfaction were spread all over his greasy, well-rounded face. Kore was satisfied with the prosecutor, with the law and with the administration of justice in general, with life itself, with the whole wide world as it was constituted in that moment of supreme delight. He felt that after all it was worth while living, and

founding states which take such paternal interest in their subject's grievances and which look after the money-boxes of little confectioners.

Now it was Nicholas's turn to reply to the speech of the prosecution.

In our country, the speech for the defense is the last word at a trial. The defendant himself is the only one who may say his say after his counsel has delivered his last appeal. In other countries it may be different, but in Hungary we are liberal in that we allow the accused man, defending his liberty or his life, to put in the last word. All the prosecutor is allowed to say after that, is that he appeals from the decision of the court. No rebuttals are allowed. So Nicholas arose.

Riza had scarcely listened to what the state's attorney had to say. She either looked at the window, or turned her face toward that meager section of the public called the audience. She even smiled when she noticed the little student who

was studying canon law from his notes, in one of the back seats. Then she scrutinized the uniform of the court attendant and that of the prison guard who sat next to her, and later she began to study the face of the presiding judge. She looked everywhere, in fact she even gave an uninterested glance at the prosecutor. But she avoided Nicholas with careful and studied precaution.

Now Nicholas had arisen, beginning in a quiet and modest tone:

"Honorable Royal Tribunal . . ."

Riza looked him straight in the eyes. It was as much as to say: "Now I am not going to take my eyes off your face until you finish and sit down."

Nicholas felt that his first few sentences were restrained and timid owing to this attention from the girl. But when he realized that it would be vain to look away, to gaze about elsewhere, to look at the three judges, or turn toward the prosecutor who stared ahead of him with a bored ex-

pression, as if the last thing in the world he was thinking of was the three hundred guldens; when Nicholas realized that his eyes could not find a better resting-place, nor a more inspiring, than the trusting, pleading, loving eyes of the prisoner, he surrendered his gaze to the girl, giving her in return confidence and courage.

And now, whether he wanted to or not, Nicholas was saying things that Riza dictated to him, or rather called from him. For there were certain emotions in Nicholas's soul for which he would scarcely have sought forms for expression, had Riza not bored her gaze into his. There were ideas in his head he could never have uttered had Riza not drawn them forth. Riza's eyes entreated, encouraged, demanded, promised; they drove his thoughts, whipped his conscience, until he knew that he was going to tell everything, everything that he felt and believed, irrespective of his fiancée, without regard to judges, prosecutor, audience, or Riza herself for that matter.

The little law student at first looked up now and then from his notes of canon law, then abandoned them altogether and stared at Nicholas. He liked the speech. The presiding judge pushed his papers aside, and leaning on his elbows, began to listen to what was being said on the floor. Mr. Kore, who pretended not to be interested at all, suddenly glared out of the corners of his eyes at the leader of the opposing party, the thief-party. The only face that remained cold and ironical was that of the state's attorney. He was quite used to such youthful enthusiasms; nothing could possibly impress him that came from the table of the counsel for defense. No lawyer, certainly no young lawyer, could tell him anything new, anything interesting or anything that would excite him.

And Nicholas went on speaking with gradually increasing emotion. He pictured the life Riza had led in the provinces; he told of the circumstances that brought her to Mr. Kore's shop; he gave an

exposé of Mr. Kore himself, undressed him, stripped him of his frock-coated respectability, even his spectacles, and introduced him just as he actually was—a hard, crafty, miserly, silly old pastry-shop keeper, who had fallen in love with his waitress.

Then he began again to talk about Riza, how she was in love with *some one*—some one who could never be hers. He pictured the terrible sufferings of the unhappy girl who was all temperament, all fire, all spirit, because of her love for this man on whom she had accidentally stumbled.

It was at this point that he looked his deepest into Riza's eyes, and as he gazed they seemed to grow to immense proportions, to shine as two fiery suns blotting out by their brilliance, everything around them. Nicholas saw nothing else now but these two luminous spots. Then he told the history of the dress, not as he had heard it from Riza, but as the story had shaped itself in

his mind and heart, a wild, compelling power, an epic of boundless longing and unbridled love.

He tried to prove that at the moment Riza opened the money-box, all cold calculation, all criminal intent, all desire for money, as money, were miles away from her soul. He tried to prove that at that moment Riza heard nothing, saw nothing, thought of nothing, but was under the hypnotic spell of an irresistible urge. He did it from beginning to end with convincing force; not with the logic of an experienced lawyer, but with the moving power of simple speech, as when a man is speaking to men. He wanted above all things to prove it and he was able to prove it, because he believed it himself.

Then he too sat down. In the first moment of restless excitement he did not know what was happening around him. He did not hear the presiding judge put the question in a calm level tone:

"Defendant, have you anything to say in your defense?"

It blended into the general murmur, as did Riza's reply:

"I have nothing to say."

Not until he saw the three judges rise and leave the room, did Nicholas recover his composure. The prosecutor looked at him with a smile that expressed his contempt for a speech so youthful, so green and preposterous that it did not deserve even a word of reply from a grown-up legal mind. All this took place within a fraction of a minute, and the judges were already out of the court room, gone to discuss the case, and to decide whether Riza Nagy was guilty or not guilty.

Out of the gloom that surrounded him Riza's face was just now coming slowly into his sight. It was not the burning face that flamed toward him but a few minutes ago; now it was calm and joyous and bright. She half closed her eyes. Those who swim ashore from the sea, after a struggle with riotous waves, look something as Riza looked at this moment. There was a pleas-

ant weariness in her eyes, a sad but charming smile about her lips; a look of gratitude and a promise of reward.

Nicholas' wide-open eyes drank in all this greedily for he was not conscious of the scene about him, of the fact that he was a lawyer, or of the torrent of the speech he had just delivered. His problem had been solved by virtue of the fact that he could say all that he felt, from the very bottom of his heart, and from the most hidden recesses of his being.

The court room, the judges, the state's attorney, the attendants, the audience and His Majesty's portrait on the wall, were all scenic trappings, a stage setting to the private and personal affair of the two young people, the little drama that had been enacted unknown to audience and tribunal, and but partly realized by the two principal characters, though it had for them the significance of the inevitable.

All this is but beating about the bush. In plain

language it was nothing more or less than Nicholas confessing his love for Riza.

It did not take long for the judges to make up their minds as to the guilt or innocence of this insignificant prisoner. The attendant rapped and there was silence. The judges filed into the room, gloom sitting on their brows as if a death sentence were about to be pronounced. They took their places on the bench and the presiding judge, for the sake of dramatic pause, turned the leaves of some documents that lay before him. Then he began to speak very quietly, well knowing that he was just then the most important person in that assembly and that however inaudibly he might speak, every one would strain an ear to catch his words. Even so, one could hear only shreds of his sentences.

Something like this:

"In the name of His Majesty the King . . ."

And toward the end of his recital—

". . . seven months . . ."

The actual meaning of it really was, that while His Majesty was taking a walk somewhere near Vienna among the greenery of Schoenbrunn Castle, his judicial servants had, in his name, sentenced Riza Nagy to seven months' imprisonment; sentenced her without his knowing anything about it or caring a rap for what the gentlemen were doing in his name to Riza Nagy.

The state's attorney acquiesced in the finding, and Riza, rising from the prisoners' bench, said in a clear voice, but almost as if she were reciting in school:

"I acquiesce in the sentence. I am glad to serve the seven months."

Nicholas rebuked her with a look. He did not expect this strange statement from her, although he was the only one present who really understood the motive back of it. He was the only one who knew that this was Riza's chivalrous reply to his speech in her defense, to his confession of love and his assurance to her that he understood. In that

speech he had broken his engagement to Lenke and had committed himself irrevocably to a girl who had been swept by society out of life's broad highroad into life's ugly scrap-heap.

And now Riza gave him answer, and in the one way she could give it. Could she have spoken it aloud, she would have said something like this:

"I love you, because you are brave and because you have told me everything to my face, things that only brave and strong men dare to tell a woman to her face, if that woman is what I happen to be. And because I love you, I am going to prove to you that I have not been gambling on you, that I did not intend to use you as a liberator, that I did not mean to take advantage of you in the service of a petty cause, but that I love you as though I were the richer, the stronger and the purer of the two. . . . I am going to prove it by serving this prison sentence and I shall not permit you to take any 'steps in my behalf.' This moment every connection between us that is not love

ceases to exist. You have ceased to be my lawyer and I have ceased to be your client. I take you as you are, but you, too, must take me as I am. You are ready for marriage, for you have been the betrothed of a pure and innocent girl. My readiness for marriage is not secret either, no pretenses of purity, no effort to hide the adventurous sufferings of a vagrant life; and my dowry is seven months in prison. If you want me in this way, here I am!"

As she could not possibly utter all this aloud, she merely said: "I acquiesce in the sentence."

But that she meant it all, nothing could have been clearer; all that was in her heart to say, she said in those few words.

Nicholas entered a formal appeal, in spite of her acquiescence, and the trial of Riza Nagy came to an end.

Both left the court room, she by the right door, he by the left, with the self-same feeling in their hearts. Each knew that this had not been a trial

before the tribunal, but merely an occasion, an opportunity for them to pour out their hearts to each other. And in this hour, they saw humanity in all its littleness, with its solemn judges, its court attendants, its ineffectual prisons and all its legal pomposities. Had it been possible, they would have smiled together over the fact that such petty and insignificant things were possible.

No one has ever been able to say which is right in its attitude—the world, which hates and despises such superiority, or these two, who had kicked the world out from under their feet. It is the ultimate mystery, the secret of all secrets, unsolved after the centuries, though now and again some one professes to have found the answer, it is really nothing but the drowsy movement as of one turning in his sleep, in order to sleep more sweetly, more comfortably.

Outside, in Alkotmany Street, two people were waiting to hear the result of the trial. Neither dared enter the court room. At one corner, stood

Sebfi, pale and trembling; at the opposite, Maria, without the slightest sign of excitement about her.

When Nicholas came through the doorway, his eyes half closed, his face lifted, both of them stirred and each took a step toward the young lawyer. He saw Sebfi first, but he looked past him, as if he had not seen him at all. It was not the cut direct, however, but merely a gesture of dismissal such as the knowing give to those who can never hope to understand.

Then as Nicholas turned, he saw Maria. Maria looked him straight in the eyes, and though he glanced at her, being sorry for her, he ignored her. He had expected to take a cab, but when he saw these two, fearing they might think he was running away from them, he waved the cab away, and to their astonishment, walked past them, between them, slowly and with great dignity—as between Scylla and Charybdis, as the old story books would put it. Then he disappeared at a turning.

Scylla and Charybdis looked at each other, then they rushed together, meeting in the middle of the street, and broke out into loud and excited questioning.

"What happened?"

"Did they acquit her?"

"Was she sentenced?"

"Didn't he greet you either?"

At this point in their dialogue, an old gentleman approached them. It was the smiling Mr. Kore. They seized upon him.

"What happened?"

"Well," he began very deliberately. . . .

"Was she acquitted?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Kore. "There is still justice on this earth. She was sentenced. . . ."

"Oh! This is terrible," groaned poor Sebfi.

Mr. Kore continued triumphantly.

"She got seven months. And I have just had a talk with the state's attorney, who is a very decent and just man, and he said it was no use

for the lawyer to appeal, for it is a clear case and these seven months will stick."

"Terrible!" said Sebfi.

"Terrible," echoed Maria.

But Kore only looked at them and smiled.

Riza was taken the very same day to the old city prison. But Lenke Rimmer did not see her, for Lenke Rimmer was packing her trunks to go to her relatives at Kecskemet. No one was there to greet the prisoner but Szabo, the guard.

A cab, jogging slowly along, followed the patrol wagon that brought Riza to the old city prison. They reached the barred gate at the same moment. Nicholas jumped from the cab and hurried to the office in time to see Riza handed over to her new custodians. And as she was about to be led away, old Mr. Rimmer entered. Not a muscle of his honest face twitched, by no sign did he reveal what was passing through his mind at that moment. He was the warden of

the prison now, with his white cap of office; and Nicholas was not Nicholas, but the lawyer, the legal representative of the prisoner whose case was under appeal.

Nicholas looked at the warden for a moment, then taking Riza Nagy's hand in his and bending over it without any offensive pose—he pressed it to his lips, respectfully, lovingly.

He walked with her to the door of her cell; he even looked into the tiny room where Riza was to live for seven long months. Then suddenly he felt that there dwelt between these narrow walls, all liberty, all freedom of thought, of feeling, the revolutionary liberation of human morality; while all that lay outside these four walls was but a prison, and all they who go about with head lifted high in pride, who have failed to learn the Master's lesson of forgiveness—the prison guards of convict morality—they are the prisoners. . . .

THE END

G554

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